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MATTHEW AUSTIN.¹

BY W. E. NORRIS.

CHAPTER XXI.

BANNOCK LODGE.

TOWARDS the middle of July—which chanced, that year, to be a dull, rainy and oppressive month—Matthew began to be vaguely disquieted about Lilian. She no longer wrote to him with her former regularity; her letters, when they came, were shorter, far less circumstantial, and invariably opened with a sort of irritated apology for her remissness, which she did not ascribe, as she might have done, to stress of engagements, but to lack of any topics worth writing about. 'It is always the same old story over and over again,' she declared; 'you must be as sick of hearing about these things as I am of doing them.'

To her meeting with Leonard Jerome she had made no allusion; and at this omission Matthew was a little surprised, because Leonard himself had made a point of writing to report the circumstance; but possibly that might be one of the incidents which Lilian deemed unworthy of special mention. It was, however, noticeable that from the date of its occurrence she became more and more imperative in her entreaties to her betrothed to come up to London, if only for a day or two. 'I think you *ought* to come, and I think it is hardly fair upon me that you don't,' she had written once, using, as it happened, almost the identical language employed by Leonard Jerome upon the same subject. But the coincidence—which indeed he regarded as a

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coincidence, pure and simple—neither suggested misgivings to Matthew's mind nor shook his resolution. He felt in honour bound to let Lady Sara have a free hand, and this was, in substance, the reply that he made to both his correspondents.

Nevertheless, on this moist, muggy, airless morning, as he stood by his dining-room window, with an open letter in his hand, and stared at the drenched geraniums and begonias and calceolarias, he was asking himself whether, after all, his duty was quite as clear as he had hitherto imagined it to be. Had he not, perhaps, been thinking rather too much about what he owed to the mother and hardly enough about what he owed to the daughter and to himself? He turned once more to the sheet of note-paper which he had already perused more often than was necessary in order to master its contents.

'For the last time,' Lilian wrote, 'will you come and see me? I suppose you must wish to see me, as you always say that you do, and unless you come soon, I can't tell when we shall meet again, or even'—here a few words were very carefully erased. 'At the end of this month,' she went on, 'we are going to stay with some people in Hampshire, and after that there will be visits upon visits until the winter, as far as I can see. If I could have had my way, we should have returned to Wilverton at the end of the season, but what can I do, now that all these invitations have been accepted? You think, no doubt, that you are behaving chivalrously, and, in a way, I dare say you are, but you might remember sometimes that it is a little hard to have to do *all* the fighting.'

Possibly it was a little hard; possibly also—as indeed she seemed almost to hint—the fighting operations which she had to undertake were not directed solely against such feeble opponents as her mother and a family council. Only, in that case, she ought surely to be left to undertake them alone. If she was beginning to repent ever so slightly of her impetuous promises, if there was a shadow of doubt in her mind as to whether she had not made her choice too hastily, it would be ill done on his part to intervene or to bring any sort of pressure to bear upon her. This was Matthew's final conclusion, and he was all the more sure of its being a right conclusion because he would so gladly have decided otherwise.

'She will think,' said he to himself, 'that I don't care enough about her to come to her aid when I am called. So be it! I

would a thousand times rather have her think that than lead her into doing what can never be undone, and what she may regret when it is too late.'

It was a relief to put these views, or something equivalent to them, into writing, to close the envelope, stamp it, and despatch it to the post, beyond reach of recall. There are cases in which the real truth—*la vérité vraie*—must not be told: all one can hope for is that a truly sympathetic soul may contrive to read between the lines. There was at least this to be said, Matthew reflected, casting about him somewhat forlornly for stray scraps of consolation, that he had done Lilian no injury. If he had a rival, and was destined to have a supplanter, that happy man would, no doubt, be a rival and supplanter of the right sort. The danger which he had formerly dreaded on her behalf, the danger that she might, through indifference or ignorance, be induced to espouse some aged aristocrat or millionaire, had, he felt sure, been conjured away. And it is one of those melancholy duties which fall to the share of a faithful historian to add that Mr. Bush received an unusually sharp lecture that day. Bush considered such rebukes unmerited and uncalled for, and did not hesitate to say so. He could not, he remarked, control the 'helements.' He likewise expressed a decided opinion to the effect that his master's health and temper, 'sim'lar to plants,' were suffering from abnormal atmospheric conditions, and he made so bold as to strongly advise a change of air.

It might be that Bush was in the right; there was no need to be a physician in order to know that occasional holidays are requisite to keep mind and body in good condition, and Matthew began to think of a few weeks in Switzerland or the Tyrol. Change of air, change of scene, something that would induce a sort of false oblivion, something that would, at all events, help to make the time pass away—that was the prescription which he would have given to anybody else, and why should he not apply it to himself?

The continent of Europe, however, was not fated to be trodden by his wandering feet that year; for while he was still dallying with the idea of a foreign trip—and this half-hearted dalliance occupied his leisure for some little time—there came to him a letter from Leonard Jerome which diverted the current of his plans and wishes into quite another channel.

'My sister, Lady Bannock,' Leonard wrote, 'is awfully anxious

to know you, and I am commissioned by her to say that, if you will excuse an unceremonious invitation and come to us in the Highlands about the last week in August, she will feel immensely honoured and flattered and all the rest of it. Do come, like a good chap, and give an old friend the satisfaction of seeing your face once more. You needn't shoot unless you like, but I may tell you that it won't matter a bit if you shoot badly. Bannock can't hit a haystack at fifty yards, and I'm no great shakes, and we should as soon think of asking a crack shot to stay at Bannock Lodge as of publishing our record. So, if you have got a gun and a rifle, bring them with you, and if you haven't, you can be supplied on arrival. All this won't tempt you, I dare say; but I know what will. Lady Sara Murray and her daughter are going to join our small house-party some time between the 20th of August and the 1st of September, and unless I am much mistaken, one of them will be as pleased to see you as I shall be—which is saying a lot.'

Well, this heartily proffered hospitality was very tempting, and acceptance of it seemed to be legitimate; because it had been pretty well understood from the first that Matthew's period of banishment was to be conterminous with the close of the London season. After considering awhile, he replied by a letter of warm thanks and conditional acquiescence, writing at the same time to Lilian, who was now in Hampshire, to tell her of the project and state that he would be guided entirely by her wishes in the matter.

What Lilian would say he was by no means sure. Their correspondence, since his reluctant refusal to respond to her last appeal, had languished perceptibly; she had made no disguise of the fact that she was hurt and disappointed; she had gone so far as to declare that pretty language did not, in her opinion, atone for supineness, and it now seemed quite upon the cards that she might see fit to punish him by declining tardy reparation. But no such unhandsome revenge was, it appeared, contemplated by her. The return post brought Matthew a missive, couched in much more affectionate terms than those which he had received of late, and in it Lilian proclaimed the delight with which she would now look forward to her visit to Bannock Lodge. 'I was rather dreading it,' she avowed, 'because, as you are aware, I am not particularly devoted to your friend Mr. Jerome, and I hardly know Lady Bannock; but this makes all the difference! I shall begin

to count the days at once, and when you write to Mr. Jerome, you may tell him from me that I am pleased with him. He evidently understands that his society is hardly an attractive bait enough in itself.'

Thus it came about that, on a windy, showery evening of late summer, the hero of this narrative reached the unpretending shooting-lodge in Ross-shire which was more often tenanted by Lord Bannock's friends than by its owner. Matthew, who had had a long drive from the nearest railway-station and who had been enjoying the keen, invigorating air, the flying shadows of the clouds upon the hillsides, and even the occasional downpours of pelting rain, was glad, when his destination came in sight, to perceive that the building was not of a size to accommodate many guests. He had, in obedience to instructions, brought his gun with him (a rifle he did not possess), but he had by no means decided to use it, nor was he ambitious of making an exhibition of himself in the presence of a large number of spectators.

His hostess proved to be as simple and unpretentious as the establishment over which she was at that time presiding. She came out to the doorstep to welcome him, and, after ascertaining that he was not in the least fatigued by his journey, said:

'You had better come and have some tea with me now; Leonard and the others will be back before long. We are quite a small party, and for the present I have only one lady, Madame d'Aultran, who is out shooting with the men. I doubt whether they are blessing her, but she would go. Leonard tells me that you are not a very enthusiastic sportsman.'

'I can't call myself a sportsman at all,' Matthew answered. 'I don't think I have had a gun in my hand more than twenty times since I was a boy, and as I never so much as saw a grouse upon its native heather, I must not venture to compete with your lady friend.'

'Oh, you will have to shoot,' Lady Bannock returned, laughing good-humouredly; 'there is absolutely no alternative. Even my husband shoots when he is here, much as he hates it. My husband is a hunting-man, and just now he is a yachting-man, *faute de mieux*. He has gone off for a few weeks' cruise, leaving Leonard to do the honours, which is much the best arrangement. Leonard, as I dare say you have discovered, does everything well.'

'Except, perhaps, cycling?'

'Oh, poor fellow, yes. I never heard of anything more pathetic than his being driven to such extremities by his desire to behave dutifully to Uncle Richard, who, between ourselves, is a horrid old man. Still, the accident was not altogether to be deplored, since it was the means of bringing you and Leonard together.'

Lady Bannock was very friendly and chatty across her well-furnished tea-table. Presently, as was inevitable, she alluded to the approaching visit of Lady Sara Murray and her daughter; but she asked no questions, and Matthew's gratitude for her forbearance was enhanced by a suspicion that she felt some curiosity as to the precise state of his relations with her future guests.

'Leonard was very anxious that they should be asked,' she explained, 'and I shall be only too delighted to have them; because I presume they won't bring gun-cases, like Madame d'Aultran. Probably they will be contented to go up on the hill with me and the luncheon sometimes.'

'And I hope I may be allowed to form one of the party on those occasions,' Matthew said.

'Well, I don't know about that; you will have to do what Leonard tells you. I believe he has set his heart upon your bringing down at least one stag, to exhibit as a trophy to Miss Murray.'

'As if there were the remotest chance of my ever being able to hit a stag!'

'You will if you get the chance. Stags are very big animals, and there is always plenty of time to aim. Lord Bannock declares that it is only the good shots that miss, and that they only miss through over-anxiety. He accounts for his own success by saying that the whole thing is such unqualified misery to him that he doesn't care a straw what happens when the critical moment comes. Leonard is much more keen; but then Leonard never does anything by halves.'

Assuredly there was nothing half-hearted about Leonard's welcome of his friend. He appeared, after a time, in his shooting boots and knickerbockers, and greeted the new arrival with almost boisterous effusiveness.

'We should have been home an hour ago,' he said, 'only that awful woman kept us back. She got dead-beat, as I knew she would, and wanted to sit down and take a nip out of somebody's flask at every hundred yards.'

'Can she shoot?' Lady Bannock inquired.

'Oh, yes, she can fire off any number of cartridges. She can't *hit* anything, except by accident. Mercifully, she didn't hit any of us. Well, it's all in the day's work, and there's no harm done. We're only a shooting-party *pour rire*, you know, Austin.'

'Leonard is so good-tempered!' Lady Bannock murmured explanatorily.

Indeed, it was evident that, in the opinion of this fond sister, Leonard possessed every virtue which can adorn a human character. He seemed, at least, to possess in a remarkable degree the virtue of hospitality; for nothing had been neglected to make Matthew comfortable, and when the latter went upstairs to dress for dinner, he found that various trifling predilections of his had been remembered and provided for. It is in this way, much more frequently than by substantial benefits conferred or sacrifices submitted to, that affection is won.

However, it was a genuine and substantial kindness to have asked a duffer to a Highland shooting-lodge at all, and so our hero felt, after he had descended to the low-pitched drawing-room and had been introduced to the four men who were his fellow-guests. These stalwart, sunburnt gentlemen did not convey to him the impression of being sportsmen *pour rire*, and would probably have been as much surprised as displeased to hear themselves described in such terms. They were polite, but he fancied that they scrutinised him with a certain apprehension, and he gathered from a few muttered remarks which he overheard that their patience had been sorely tried that day.

'Well, they needn't be alarmed,' he thought. 'Nothing shall persuade me to spoil their sport; and if the lady wants to go out to-morrow, I will go with her. Then, perhaps, they will recognise that I am a blessing in disguise.'

But the Vicomtesse d'Aultran, who presently entered, and whose brocade and diamonds looked a little out of keeping with her close-cropped, artificially curled blonde hair, her pince-nez, and her would-be mannish carriage, lost no time in proclaiming to all and sundry whom it might concern that she had had enough of such sport as was obtainable in her present quarters.

'This shooting over dogs is no fun at all,' she asserted. 'Why do you not have your birds driven, as they do in Yorkshire, where I was staying with Lord Towers last year? That was worth the trouble of going out for; but here—I am sure you will pardon

me for saying so, dear Lady Bannock—I have been thinking all day what a wise man Lord Bannock is to *ficher le camp*! To-morrow I stay in bed until midday and read Pierre Loti's last novel—*c'est positif*!

She spoke English with ease and fluency. She was a plain-featured little woman, but her self-satisfaction was evidently undisturbed by any inkling of her physical disadvantages or any suspicion of the relief with which her statement was listened to by her audience. Her husband—so Leonard whispered to Matthew—was attached to the Belgian Legation, and she was considered to be capital company. It cannot, however, be said that Matthew, who found himself placed beside her at the dinner-table, felt disposed to subscribe to the general verdict in that respect.

'I am enchanted to have met you,' she was kind enough to tell him, after champagne had started a sufficient flow of general conversation to admit of asides; 'I was dying to see the *fiancé* for whose sake the beautiful Miss Murray is said to have spurned more than one coronet.'

'I trust,' said Matthew, 'that I come up to your expectations.'

'Oh, my expectations are of little consequence; the important affair is that you should satisfy Miss Murray's expectations after a period of separation so full of events and experiences for her. Do you not feel nervous?'

'I doubt whether I should confess it if I did,' Matthew replied. 'Are you thinking of making a long stay in Scotland?'

But Madame d'Aultran was not to be diverted from her subject. 'That depends,' said she. 'Lady Bannock is charming; but she comes here to rest after the fatigues of the season, and she is quite happy to do nothing all day long. That is very well for persons of a certain age, but it is not my idea. I am one of those who demand perpetual amusement. Possibly you may provide me with some—you and your lovely *fiancée*—for I adore a romance.'

She proceeded, with a frankness which he could not sufficiently admire, to state her reasons for hoping that this particular romance might not be unaccompanied by dramatic episodes. She had watched Miss Murray in London, she said, and was of opinion that volcanic fires lurked beneath that calm surface.

'You may be her master,' the outspoken lady concluded, 'but it is certain that, if you are, you are not *le premier venu*. And

have you no fear at all of any of these gentlemen? It seems to me that, under the circumstances, a little fear would not be out of place. However, we shall see.'

Before leaving the room, she gave Matthew a cigarette out of her silver case, and, placing another between her own lips, bent over one of the candles to light it.

'I shall never become accustomed to your barbarous practice of dismissing us as soon as dinner is over,' she remarked.

But since nobody manifested the slightest desire to depart from established rules for her benefit, she had to follow her hostess; after which the talk was of grouse and nothing else until bedtime.

It was at a comparatively early hour that the weary sportsmen, who naturally wished to keep their eyes clear, retired; and Matthew, not feeling sleepy, had ensconced himself in an arm-chair, with a book, before his bedroom fire when a rap at the door was followed by the entrance of Leonard Jerome. Leonard had ostensibly come to insist upon it that his friend should not shirk the duties of the morrow, and he explained that the party would be divided, 'so that you and I can go with old Standish, who is the best-natured fellow in the world and won't criticise either of us.' But the true purport of this nocturnal visit became apparent to a close observer when he inquired carelessly:

'By the way, what was that horrid little Belgian woman saying to you about Miss Murray at dinner? I could see by her face that she was talking about Miss Murray.'

'Nothing libellous,' answered Matthew, laughing; 'she only thought it kind to warn me that there might be rocks and shoals ahead. I suppose I did not strike her as presenting the appearance of a lover who could afford to risk rivalry with younger and more fascinating men.'

'Impudent little wretch!' exclaimed Leonard; 'I hope you snubbed her as she deserved. She wouldn't be here, I can assure you, if she hadn't invited herself. She didn't—er—caution you against anybody in particular, then?'

'She mentioned nobody in particular. Is there anybody in particular whom she might have mentioned?'

'To the best of my belief, not a soul,' answered Leonard, with a certain eagerness. 'It's an open secret that Miss Murray has refused some good offers; but of course you know that. And I do hope, old man, that you'll lose no time now in getting every-

thing settled. As far as I can understand, Lady Sara won't be obdurate, and—and surely this ordeal has lasted long enough!

'Perhaps it has,' Matthew replied slowly. 'Anyhow, you have given me an opportunity which might have been deferred indefinitely, but for you, and no friend could have done more.'

'I have tried to behave like your friend and—and hers,' the other declared; 'I suppose, as you say, nobody could do more for you than to bring you together.'

He fidgeted about the room for a few minutes, and then remarked: 'Well, I'm off to bed, and you had better follow my example. You'll be ready enough to turn in by this time to-morrow night, I expect.'

CHAPTER XXII.

MATTHEW'S TRIUMPH.

'So, after all, you are not going to stay at home and pretend you don't know how to shoot, Mr. Austin,' Lady Bannock remarked, glancing at Matthew's knickerbocker breeches, when he came down to breakfast the next morning.

'There's no pretence about the matter, I assure you,' he answered; 'but I have been ordered to go out, and all I hope for is that I may be ordered home again early in the day. If your brother would only believe me, it is no sort of pleasure to me to spoil other people's sport.'

'And if you would only believe me, you *can't* spoil anybody's sport at this game,' Leonard declared. 'You aren't being asked to take part in a swagger battue, and you may miss every single bird that rises to you with a perfectly clear conscience. Not that you are a bit more likely to miss than I am.'

But not long after the tyro, accompanied by his friend and Colonel Standish, a wiry little man with a brown face and grizzled moustache, had set forth and had breasted one of the hills by which the house was surrounded, he began to suspect, for his comfort, that not too many chances of exhibiting his incapacity would be accorded to him. To right and left of him his companions got a shot apiece and killed their respective birds neatly; soon afterwards the same thing occurred again, with a similar result, and Matthew was inwardly blessing them for their foresight and consideration in having placed him in the middle when

a covey of six rose suddenly directly in front of him. This time he was bound to fire; so he selected his bird and was even more astonished than relieved to see it stop and fall. Nobody said a word, which caused him some momentary disappointment; but the fact was that the other two men were far too intent upon their work to waste time in paying him compliments. One of them might be what he had proclaimed himself, a bad shot (the other had not indulged in unnecessary self-depreciation), but certainly there was very little bad shooting that morning. Regard for truth compels Mr. Austin's biographer to state that what little there was was provided by the hero of this narrative; still he might have done a great deal worse, and perhaps it was rather wonderful that, with his total lack of practice, he did so well.

'I knew you were an old humbug,' Leonard said, when at length a halt was called; 'at this rate, you'll be taking the shine out of us all next week.'

'Two brace and a half, I believe,' answered Matthew modestly; 'but I am afraid it ought to have been four brace.'

'Oh, I don't know; you seemed to me to take every chance you got, except perhaps one. Upon my word, we're in luck to-day, though! I never expected to see so many birds, did you, Standish?'

Colonel Standish smiled and said: 'No, by Jove, I didn't! If those other fellows want to beat us, they'll have to look sharp.'

But he was evidently anxious to get on; and so, for the matter of that, was Matthew, who was already bitten with the sport-fever and was no longer in terror of committing some dire solecism. The task set before him was, after all, straightforward enough, and reminiscences of his boyhood enabled him to avoid glaring misbehaviour. Then, too, the air was exhilarating, the exercise was invigorating, it was a joy to watch the dogs working, and, happily, when he missed, he missed. If it be cruel—and there is not much use in denying that it is cruel—to slay wild birds and beasts, the guilt involved in so doing is at least no greater than that of consenting to the daily slaughter of sheep and oxen. But it is not pleasant to cause torture through clumsiness; and that is why many a man ought never to raise a gun to his shoulder. Matthew, who, it must be owned, had had some reason to suspect himself of being such a man, was proportionately thankful when he was able to sit down upon the heather and partake of a well-

earned luncheon without cause for self-reproach, save that his contribution to the bag might have been larger.

'Oh, you'll do,' Colonel Standish interrupted his apologies by saying good-naturedly; 'all you want is to get accustomed to the thing. I'd a good deal rather go out with our friend here than with Bannock, eh, Jerome?'

'Rather!' answered Leonard heartily. 'As far as that goes, I haven't a doubt that Austin would make me look small most days of the week. I happen to be rather on the spot to-day, for some reason or other.'

The fact is that both of these gentlemen were pretty well pleased with themselves, and were consequently disposed to be pleased with everybody and everything else. That they were somewhat less successful after luncheon than they had been earlier in the day was due in part to the fact that they did not meet with quite an equal measure of luck and partly to the heat of the sun, which made one of them lazy. Leonard Jerome, indeed, as Matthew had often had occasion to notice, was not a man who cared to stick to anything very long, and before four o'clock he was quite willing to leave Colonel Standish with the keeper.

'I'm sure you must have had more than enough of this, old chap,' he said to his other guest, 'and I dare say you'd like to stroll back and see what letters have come for you.'

No letters, it subsequently appeared, had arrived for Mr. Austin; but Lady Bannock, who was discovered drinking tea placidly on the lawn, beneath the shade of a gigantic Japanese umbrella, informed him, after hearing of his prowess and offering her congratulations, that she had received one in the contents of which she presumed that he would be interested.

'The Murrays will be here to-morrow afternoon,' she said. 'I shall be almost as delighted as you will be to see them, for I really don't feel equal to undertaking Madame d'Aultran single-handed. What do you think she has just been doing, Leonard?'

'Who?—Madame d'Aultran?' asked Leonard, whose colour had faded on a sudden, and who did not seem to be quite himself. 'Oh, I don't know; something funny, no doubt.'

'Well, it was funny to look at, but I am not sure that she found it as good fun as she had expected. She said she must positively be amused, and, as my company doesn't amuse her, nothing would do but that she must ride the Shetland pony. I warned her that he bucked and kicked; but she declared she

could sit anything; so we had him out and managed to get a side-saddle on his back, and Madame d'Aultran jumped into the saddle. Up went his heels, of course, and in about two seconds she was sent flying. I believe she is upstairs now, repairing damages; but the sound of your voices is sure to draw her out again.'

'Then let us on no account speak above a whisper!' exclaimed Matthew.

But that precautionary measure was taken too late, and it fell to his lot to entertain the vivacious little Belgian lady until the shooting-party reappeared, Leonard having basely fled and Lady Bannock presently begging to be excused, on the plea that she had letters to write. Madame d'Aultran had bruised her knees and scratched her hands; but she confided to Matthew that such trifling inconveniences were a small price to pay for a few moments of excitement. She catechised him as to his first impressions of grouse-shooting, and was good enough to say that she would perhaps go out with him on the ensuing day.

'Before evening, *grâce à Dieu!*' she added, 'we shall have your *fiancée* here, and then, I hope, there will be fun.'

Neither then nor later was she invited to explain herself; though she evidently wished to be questioned, and seized every opportunity that offered to revert to the subject. Matthew was not the man to discuss his *fiancée* with anybody, and if this vulgar and irrepressible woman succeeded in lowering his spirits, he was properly ashamed of having allowed her to do so.

But he did not sleep, that night, as well as he ought to have done after such a fine dose of fresh air and exercise; nor, alas! could he contrive to bring down a single grouse on the morrow. Madame d'Aultran, mercifully, had thought better of her fell intention and was not yet out of bed when he set forth with his companions of the previous day; yet, after a time, he almost wished that the Vicomtesse had joined the party. Her presence, he thought, would at least have been some excuse for the amazing lack of dexterity with which the keeper's lengthening face mutely reproached him. However, Leonard and Colonel Standish were as good-natured as possible, and would not hear of letting him beat a retreat.

'You shall be released in plenty of time,' the former assured him, laughing; 'I give you my word that it isn't possible for any visitors, travelling by road or rail, to reach the house before four o'clock.'

Colonel Standish was even more explicit. 'Don't worry yourself,' the weather-beaten little soldier took occasion to say encouragingly to Matthew, while offering him a drain out of his flask; 'no man can shoot when he's worried. I know well enough what's the matter; bless you! I've been through it all myself ages ago. Yet here I am still a bachelor at eight-and-forty, you see, and I might be a precious sight worse off! This locket,' continued the Colonel, tapping his watch-chain, 'contains a scrap of her hair; she is now a Mrs. Something Thomson and has I forget how many children. It wasn't for Thomson that she threw me over, though; there was another fellow before him, and my belief is that all women are tarred with pretty much the same brush.' I don't say this to put you off, you know; only I mean—it doesn't signify quite as much as you think it does.'

He concluded with a friendly tap upon the younger man's shoulder and a laugh which sounded oddly pathetic and compassionate.

Did the kindly little man intend to convey a note of warning? It might be so; for he mixed a good deal in fashionable society, and doubtless he had heard things. Well, the warning was not required. Matthew was prepared, and had been prepared all along, for any contingency that might arise: moreover, he had the consolation of knowing that in a very few hours he would be out of suspense. Nevertheless, he could by no means induce his hand and eye to work together, and eventually—to the keeper's undisguised relief—he gave up trying.

The afternoon was not very far advanced when he quitted the sportsmen and wandered slowly along the hillside towards Bannock Lodge. He was troubled, on his way, by sundry absurd doubts and misgivings. Would Lilian wish him to return in advance of the other men? Might she not prefer that their meeting should take place just before dinner? How would he meet her?—and in what manner would she expect him to greet her, if—as would probably be the case—her mother and Lady Bannock and Madame d'Aultran were present, as spectators of the scene?

But all these questions were delightfully answered and all these foolish doubts set at rest by the sudden apparition of a slight figure in a tweed dress and jacket and a waistcoat of the most approved pattern. Down dropped Matthew's gun upon the heather; he stretched out his arms involuntarily, and the next moment Lilian's head was upon his shoulder.

'They didn't want me to come out and meet you,' she said, after the interchange of certain more or less inarticulate speeches which there is no need to place on record, 'but I hoped that perhaps you would be walking back alone, and I was determined not to be confronted with you before them all. Well, are you glad to see me again, Mat? And, now that you do see me, what do you think of me? Have I improved or deteriorated?'

He was able to answer the first question in the affirmative without hesitation; as for the others, it was necessary to wait a little longer before making any replies which could be pronounced at once truthful and satisfactory. But so far as mere outward appearance went, she had certainly improved, and for the rest, she did not allow him much time to speak. She was voluble, she was excited, she had a hundred things to tell him and a hundred more to ask him about; there was no trace in her manner of that constraint which had at one time been painfully apparent in her correspondence. Every now and again she interrupted herself to say how thankful she was to be near him once more.

'It is a clear case of Providential interference!' she declared, 'and if we only had a patron-saint apiece—as of course we ought to have—it would be our duty to supply them with any number of the best wax candles.'

'I don't know whether Jerome would care about wax candles,' remarked Matthew, 'but he has undoubtedly shown himself our patron on the present occasion. Perhaps he could hardly be described as a saint, though.'

'He?—oh, no, he's a distinct sinner. There was a St. Jerome once upon a time, wasn't there? He must have been very unlike his modern namesake. Of course you have a lot of other stupid sort of men staying in the house.'

'Surely you don't class Leonard Jerome among the stupid sort of men!'

'Oh, well; it doesn't matter whether he is stupid or clever, for he will be out shooting all day long, I hope and trust. You won't want to shoot every day, will you? I suppose it will be acknowledged that we are privileged persons and that we may go off by ourselves—you and I.'

'Is that at all likely to be acknowledged?' Matthew asked.

'It *must* be,' answered the girl decisively; 'Mamma admits now that the engagement must be formally announced. Don't

you understand that she couldn't have come here unless she had made up her mind to the inevitable?'

'She is still opposed to it, then.'

'I don't know. I think she is still rather surprised at my obstinacy; but she is as fond of you as ever, and at the bottom of her heart she is longing to see you again and tell you all about her rheumatism. Oh, Mat, if you could but realise what a relief it is to have you on the spot! Do you know that, all this time, you have been behaving very much as if you didn't really want to marry me at all?'

The least he could do was to demonstrate that there was no shadow of foundation for that impression; and in truth the task was not a difficult one, although it proved somewhat protracted. And on his side, how could he doubt any longer that Lilian's love for him was genuine and permanent? It had stood the test of absence, it had withstood every temptation by which its stability could have been assailed, and although, like Lady Sara, he might—and indeed did—marvel at his own triumph, he was bound to accept, with due humility and gratitude, the fact that he had triumphed.

It was with humility, if not precisely with gratitude, that Lady Sara herself accepted that indisputable fact. She told him so before he had been five minutes in her bedroom, whither he was summoned immediately upon his return to the house, and long before he had concluded the medical examination which he was requested to institute. 'I believe I have done all that any mother could do,' she said—as though she owed Matthew some apology for her failure—'but Lilian is too self-willed for me. I can only let her have her own way now, and trust that she may not live to repent.'

'You do not flatter me,' Matthew remarked, smiling.

'Oh, it isn't you; you are as good as gold, and I don't know why a reasonable woman shouldn't be perfectly happy with you. But Lilian isn't reasonable. I can't understand her, and I suppose I shall never feel quite easy about her to my dying day. In many ways she reminds me of my poor sister, about whom you have heard, of course. However, we will hope for the best.'

'It seems to me that we are entitled to do that,' said Matthew. 'At any rate, if she is not happy with me, the fault shall not be mine. You have been very good to me, both of you.'

'You have been very good to us,' Lady Sara returned. 'It

stands to reason that I should have preferred a different sort of alliance; but in all truth and sincerity there is no man in England whom I should have preferred to you, personally.'

It was, therefore, as a formally engaged man that Matthew went downstairs shortly before the dinner-hour. He found his betrothed in the drawing-room with Leonard Jerome, who at once stepped forward to shake him by the hand and wish him joy. Lady Bannock was told; everybody in the house was told; and it must be confessed that everybody looked a little surprised.

'Small blame to them!' the bridegroom-elect reflected. 'It *is* a surprising thing, and I myself am quite as much surprised at it as they can be.'

He could have wished, however, that Leonard had been less noisily congratulatory, and that, having proclaimed his friend's good fortune, he would have consented to let the subject drop. Something of this sort Matthew whispered to Lilian, who shrugged her bare shoulders and returned:

'Do you object? I don't. I suppose Mr. Jerome wants to make us feel uncomfortable; but he hasn't succeeded with me, and I hope you won't let him imagine that he has succeeded with you. As far as I am concerned, the whole world is welcome to know that I am going to marry the best man in the world.'

Upon the whole, that was a very happy evening for Matthew. It certainly was not spoilt for him by sundry ironical utterances of Madame d'Aultran's, nor did he so very much mind Leonard's pleasantries, although some of them struck him as being in rather bad taste. Yet, for some reason which eluded his mental grasp, there was a perplexing sense of unreality about it all. The oddest thing was that, when he bade Lady Sara good-night, she gripped his hand nervously, and he saw, to his astonishment, that there were tears in her eyes.

'I wish we had not come here!' she exclaimed, on a sudden. 'But I think Lilian is in earnest—oh, I am sure she *must* be in earnest! And you quite understand—don't you?—that the whole thing has been her doing. I have no hold over her nowadays—none whatsoever!'

Now, it was simply impossible to doubt that Lilian was in earnest. Matthew assured himself of that before he went to sleep, remembering also that women in Lady Sara's state of health are likely enough to become hysterical and fanciful under the influence of emotion. 'Perhaps I may not have been told quite

everything that happened when they were in London,' was his final conclusion. 'Well, I don't want to be told everything; nobody but an arrant fool does. It is sufficient for me to know that she loves me still.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

FRESH LAURELS.

THE modern Anglican clerics who (without previous training or experience or any superabundance of mother-wit to guide them in their wielding of a dangerous weapon) have sought to revive auricular confession must, one would think, be led to form some queer conceptions respecting the depravity of human nature. Indeed, it is noticeable that this is what generally happens to them—with resultant blunders of a serio-comic kind. Upon the whole it seems most prudent to rest satisfied with the exhaustive knowledge which we all possess of the thoughts and deeds of one human being (a most sympathetic and pardonable creature he or she always is), and to avoid prying too closely into those of our neighbours.

'I tell my husband everything,' a lady once declared to the insignificant individual who had the honour to take her in to dinner. Whereupon he ejaculated, before he could stop himself, 'Then thank God I am not your husband!'

It was partly because Matthew Austin was a gentleman and partly because he was no fool that he studiously abstained from questioning his betrothed as to every episode which had occurred during the period of their separation. There had been something—that much he could see in the course of twenty-four hours—but he could not quite make out whether she wished to tell him about it or not, and, in any case, he was resolved to manifest no curiosity. What if she had hesitated for a moment?—what if she had met with somebody whom she might, under different circumstances, have cared for sufficiently to marry? Was it not precisely for that purpose that he had wished her to pass through a London season? And was not her fidelity to him infinitely more convincing and satisfactory now that it had been fairly tried?

He would indeed have been sceptical and exacting if he had not been convinced of her fidelity. During their long, solitary rambles, while the men were on the hill and the ladies more or

less occupied indoors, she gave him clearly to understand that neither in London nor elsewhere had she met with his equal. She was affectionate; she was touchingly submissive; she asseverated, until he was ashamed of saying any more about it, that the monotonous existence of a country doctor's wife had no terrors for her; her one anxiety seemed to be to please him, and she implored him again and again to point out her faults to her, so that she might try to correct them. Yet, for all that, there had been something: perhaps there still was something. Every now and again she let fall an obscure hint, but, meeting with no encouragement, reverted to other topics.

'Since you are so very eager to be convicted of sin,' Matthew said to her laughingly, one afternoon, 'I will mention a small matter in which I should like to see you change, and that is in your behaviour to poor Jerome. I know you have never liked him; but is it necessary to treat him with such persistent incivility?'

'Am I uncivil to him?' asked the girl indifferently.

'Well, I think you are, and I think he feels it. After all, we are considerably indebted to him—you and I—and it seems rather ungrateful and ungracious to take every opportunity of impressing upon him that you prefer his room to his company.'

'I will endeavour to be grateful and gracious, then. How am I to begin? Shall I offer to join the guns, like that horrible little Belgian woman who is always making eyes at you?'

'No, you might stop short of that; but perhaps it would have been kinder to go out with Lady Bannock and the luncheon to-day when he asked you. He was evidently disappointed.'

'Poor fellow! And poor you, too!—for I suppose I disappointed you into the bargain with my selfishness. Of course you must want to shoot; what else are you here for?'

Matthew assured her, with absolute sincerity, that that temptation would never have drawn him to the Highlands; but she shook her head.

'I don't believe a word of it!' she returned; 'you can't possibly prefer wandering about all day long with me to shooting grouse. It would be against nature—against masculine nature, anyhow. No; we shall have the evenings together, and sometimes, perhaps, a bit of the afternoons, and always the middle of the day; for no luncheon-basket shall be complete without me henceforth. That ought to be enough; and so it is. I shall

have to put up with a smaller share of your company than that after we are married, I dare say.'

She did not seem to be at all offended; but he was not altogether successful in persuading her that by consenting to take his gun out of its case once more he was showing himself as unselfish as she was. For the rest, he really thought that they ought to display a little more consideration for their host and hostess. He had an uncomfortable feeling that he was making rather too much of a convenience of them both.

Lady Bannock, it may be presumed, cared very little how her guests might see fit to divert themselves, so long as they left her in peace; but Leonard looked decidedly gratified when he was informed, the next morning, that Matthew would like to be allowed one more chance of missing easy shots, and that Miss Murray proposed to accompany the servants and the provisions to the appointed halting-place at midday. In order that the two parties might forgather at a given place and hour, he at once cancelled certain arrangements which he had made, and probably Colonel Standish was alone in deploring the substitution of a sort of picnic for a hard day's sport. As for Matthew, he enjoyed the picnic all the more because, during the two hours or so which preceded it, he had been shooting very fairly well and had been deservedly complimented. Modest though he was, he was not sorry to be able to give a good account of himself to the ladies.

'It seems,' observed Madame d'Aultran, who had decided to grace the occasion with her presence, 'that one can bring a few grouse down when one likes. You have eclipsed Mr. Jerome to-day—eh?'

It had been no very hard matter to eclipse Mr. Jerome, who complained of a headache, and who begged to be excused shortly after parting company with his sister and her friends. Matthew would willingly have walked home with the deserter, but was restrained both by the protests of Colonel Standish and by an intimation that Leonard did not want him. He, therefore, remained out until the dinner-hour was not far distant, acquitting himself so creditably that even the keeper bestowed a grim smile upon him, while his companion said:

'You would make a fine shot, Mr. Austin, if you cared to practise, and, by my way of thinking, it's worth everybody's while to cultivate his natural abilities. There are times, you know, when a man gets down on his luck; but if there is any form of

outdoor exercise at which he is tolerably good, he knows where to look for consolation.'

'I hope I shall always have my work,' Matthew answered, 'and when I find that discouraging—as of course doctors often do—I shall have the joys of the domestic hearth to turn to.'

'H'm!' grunted the Colonel; 'the joys of shooting are a certainty; the joys of the domestic hearth ain't. Take my word for it, there's no certainty about anything where women are concerned.'

As if to back up this *ex parte* assertion, Madame d'Aultran, who was seated beside Matthew at dinner that evening, must needs remark maliciously:

'You Englishmen have droll ways of treating your wives and daughters, not to speak of your *fiancées*. One would suppose that you thought women were to be trusted.'

'Perhaps we do think that Englishwomen are to be trusted, and perhaps we are right,' said Matthew.

Madame d'Aultran laughed stridently. 'And your Divorce Court, which is always busy?' she returned. '*Enfin!*—it is better to use one's eyes too soon than too late. If I were in your place, for example, I should take the liberty to ask Miss Murray what was the interesting subject which she and our handsome friend Mr. Jerome were discussing this afternoon. It must have been very interesting, since they had to walk about together for more than two hours before they reached the end of it—if indeed they reached the end of it then.'

Matthew was not much more likely to put the suggested question than he was to be alarmed by Madame d'Aultran's impertinent warning; but later in the evening Lilian volunteered the information for which she had not been asked.

'I have made friends with Mr. Jerome,' she said. 'We had a long walk this afternoon, and we talked about you the whole time.'

'That must have become a little monotonous, didn't it?' said Matthew, laughing.

'No,' answered Lilian, with a slight smile; 'there were a good many things to be said. Plans to be formed for your amusement, too, lest you should find life in the Highlands a little monotonous. By the way, do you know that you are to go out for your first stalk to-morrow?'

'I was not aware of it, and I can assure you that I don't intend to do anything of the sort.'

‘Oh, you will have to obey orders; all the arrangements have been made. Besides which, I want the antlers to decorate our entrance-hall at Wilverton. Can’t you see Mrs. Jennings examining the head through her glasses and inquiring where we bought it? “Oh, that is one of the stags that my husband shot in Scotland last summer,” I shall say, in an off-hand way. “He is rather fond of shooting when he has nothing better to do.”’

‘But, my dear child, it is in the last degree improbable that I shall kill a stag, even if I am given the chance; and I have heard that stalkers are not particularly fond of giving beginners a chance.’

‘Well, you will have to try, at all events, and Donald or Angus, or whatever his name may be, will certainly be forbidden to play tricks with you. Here comes Mr. Jerome to tell you all about it.’

Leonard seemed to be really anxious that his friend should not quit Bannock Lodge without having had at least one day’s experience of deer-stalking, and as everything appeared to have been settled, Matthew could hardly refuse his assent to a scheme which, to tell the truth, was not wholly distasteful to him. ‘Madame d’Aultran will have no words to express her sense of my imprudence to-morrow evening,’ he thought, with some inward amusement.

Assuredly, no misgivings of the nature alluded to by Madame d’Aultran disturbed his mind when he seated himself, early the next morning, in the dog-cart which was waiting for him at the door and was driven off towards the glen where he was to put himself in the hands of his guide. He had passed the age of irrational jealousy; besides which, he happened to know for a fact that Lilian was somewhat irrationally prejudiced against Leonard Jerome. If they had now composed their differences, so much the better: disloyalty was the last thing of which he could suspect either of them. On the other hand, he was beset by very serious misgivings as to his own ability to accomplish the task that lay before him that day, and the first thing that he said to Alick, the stalwart, brown-bearded individual who wished him good morning on his arrival at the trysting-place, was: ‘Now, I want you to understand that I know nothing about this business—absolutely nothing at all! I will try to do what you tell me; more than that you mustn’t expect.’

'Indeed, sir, it is not every gentleman that will do so much,' answered the other, with a quiet smile.

In spite, however, of this promising beginning, Matthew's first act was one of insubordination; for he resolutely declined to mount the rough little pony which one of the attendant gillies was leading. He thought it would be a good deal less tiring to scale the hillside on foot than to perch himself on that very uncomfortable-looking deer-saddle, and Alick did not insist. Only, to tell the truth, he had not bargained for quite so long or quite so precipitous a walk. The time for adopting precautions evidently had not yet come; the deer, he gathered—for he did not like to ask too many questions, and not much information was vouchsafed to him—were still miles away; progress, measured by the distance covered, seemed to be slow; yet it was all he could do to keep pace with the easy strides of the stalker and the gillie, who never turned a hair, and who, in truth, were taking things very easy, out of mercy to the uninitiated stranger. A sudden heavy shower which drenched Matthew to the skin scarcely added to his discomfort; a man in a Turkish bath has no objection to cold water. But all this (as, indeed, he had been previously warned) was nothing. There are acute miseries connected with deer-stalking; but a preliminary stroll uphill must not be accounted one of them. Even if he had thought of uttering a complaint, or of asking, as forlorn passengers are wont to ask the stewards of cross-Channel boats, whether this sort of thing was likely to last much longer, he could not have found the breath to do it. Onward and upward he plodded, in patient silence, wondering sadly whether, when the decisive moment came, he would be able so much as to attempt aiming with such a shaking hand and clouded eye.

He had no need to feel anxious on that score; for many weary hours had to elapse before the approach of the decisive moment, and ample time to grow cool in person and in nerves was reserved for him. The reconnoitring process, when at length a post of vantage had been reached; the blurred vision of a remote herd at which he was bidden to gaze through the telescope; the consultation between Alick and the gillie; the interminable, circuitous tramp up hill and down dale; and then—ah! then—the excruciating crawl, first on his hands and knees, and afterwards on the flat of his stomach, through a great dismal swamp—these were experiences which, when Matthew subse-

quently looked back upon them, appeared to him to have spread themselves over a respectable slice of his lifetime.

However, by sedulously watching and imitating his pioneer, he at least avoided doing anything wrong, and his relief was greater than his excitement when at last Alick stealthily beckoned to him to draw near. Yet it must be confessed that it brought his heart into his mouth to discern six fine stags lying down on a grassy space beneath him and not a hundred yards off. He drew in his breath and held out his hand for the rifle. But Alick, to his surprise and disappointment, made a negative sign and began a noiseless retrograde movement. There would be no chance of a shot—so he was presently given to understand—until the deer got up and began to feed again; it was not yet one o'clock—Good heavens! not yet one o'clock!—and a further delay of an hour and a half, or perhaps two hours, must be submitted to.

That long wait was certainly the worst part of the entire ordeal. Little comfort was to be got out of a few saturated sandwiches and a short pull of raw whisky; smoking was impossible, and although Alick and the gillie exchanged some whispered remarks, Matthew did not dare to join in their conversation. Had he been a keen sportsman, he would doubtless have been miserable enough; but he was not particularly keen, and his misery was intensified by the conviction that all this tremendous outlay of skill, labour and perseverance would prove to have been utterly wasted. He was sorry for himself and sorry for Lilian, but chiefly he was sorry for poor Alick, whom he could never venture to look in the face again after the failure which he felt to be a foregone conclusion. All the greater, therefore, was the joy of ultimate success. 'I can't in the least tell you how it happened,' he said, giving as circumstantial an account of himself as he could to Lilian that evening; 'all I know is that it was an easy broad-side shot and that I was so paralysed by terror of missing that I obeyed instructions quite mechanically. He went like the wind for about eighty yards and then dropped, stone-dead. Alick thinks I might have got another, but he comforts me by saying that I was right not to fire unless I was pretty sure. Pretty sure indeed! Well, at any rate, I am pretty sure of one thing now, and that is that deer-stalking is worth the trouble. Only it is too exciting for a sober old country doctor like me, and I am not going out again. At least, not until next time.'

As matters fell out, no 'next time' ever came, and that fine

head remains Matthew Austin's unique trophy of the kind. But as long as he lives he is likely to preserve in all its freshness the recollection of his one day's stalking—of the moment when Alick handed him the rifle, silently indicating the stag at which he was to aim, of the unspeakable satisfaction with which he heard the thud of the bullet as it struck, of the well-earned pipe afterwards, and of the long triumphant march home through sweeping showers and flying gleams of sunshine. Upon certain other incidents of his visit to Bannock Lodge he has not cared to dwell with equal frequency, and these have consequently lost clearness of outline in his memory. Happily for us all, we are so constituted that we remember the good days of the past, while we begin to forget pain from the moment when it ceases to hurt us.

CHAPTER XXIV.

USQUE RECURRET.

LILIAN spoke the truth (and it must be said for her that she almost invariably did speak the truth) in telling Matthew that he had been the chief subject of conversation between her and Leonard Jerome during that protracted colloquy which had excited the curiosity of Madame d'Aultran. But the subject had not been of her choosing, nor had she greatly enjoyed hearing her future husband's praises sung at such inordinate length and in a tone which seemed to imply that she might not be fully alive to the extent of her good fortune. She would have talked about something else, only that that had appeared quite the safest thing to talk about, and that, for various reasons, some of which were not very clearly defined, the question of safety had to be taken into consideration. At all events, she had no desire to revert to it on the ensuing day, and she learnt with some annoyance that Mr. Jerome was still feeling too unwell to go out shooting with the other men. At luncheon Lady Bannock made a prodigious fuss over him, pressing him to eat certain delicacies which had been specially prepared with a view to tempt his palate, and appealing to Miss Murray to say whether he was not looking wretchedly ill. As a matter of fact, he was looking rather pale, and Lilian, after a hasty glance at him, unfeelingly suggested a couple of pills; but, as he pointed out to her, it was impossible for him to carry out

her prescription then and there, and, since he saw fit to hang about the house the whole afternoon, it proved equally impossible for her to avoid his society. They had a game of billiards together, during which she was absent-minded and taciturn, and then, towards evening, he proposed that they should walk up the glen and meet Matthew, who ought, he said, to be nearing home by that time.

Lilian replied, with a yawn, that she had no objection; so they set forth, and before they had proceeded very far on their way he began, somewhat abruptly:

‘I have always wanted to explain to you about that photograph, Miss Murray. I can’t tell you how sorry I was to have given offence by what I really thought at the time was a harmless little indiscretion.’

Now, Lilian had repeatedly seen him and conversed with him since the occurrence of the episode alluded to, and she saw no reason why he should choose this particular moment to remind her of an indiscretion which she had neither forgotten nor entirely forgiven.

‘I don’t know what possible explanation you can give,’ she answered curtly, ‘and I haven’t the slightest curiosity to listen to one. It is generally considered bad form to buy a photograph of a girl with whom you are acquainted and exhibit it on your table, as if she had presented it to you, isn’t it?’

‘But I didn’t exhibit it,’ pleaded Leonard eagerly; ‘I kept it in my own private den, where nobody could see it, except myself.’

It was upon the tip of Lilian’s tongue to rejoin that he was not improving his case; but she thought better of it, and only said impatiently: ‘Oh, well! it doesn’t in the least signify now, one way or the other. If you want my photograph, I am sure you are very welcome to it, and I will look one out for you as soon as I go in. Which will be immediately,’ she added, as a warning drop of rain fell on her cheek. ‘I don’t want to be soaked.’

Soaked, however, she was; for she persisted in walking straight back to the house, notwithstanding his entreaties that she would take shelter under the lee of an overhanging rock until the shower should have passed.

‘Is this necessary?’ he exclaimed at length. ‘You might keep comparatively dry and get rid of me, you know. I am perfectly willing to walk on by myself and meet Austin.’

'In your present precarious state of health!' she returned, with a short laugh. 'Oh, no; you must come home and be taken care of. What would Lady Bannock say if you were to catch a cold in your head?'

He splashed along silently by her side for some little distance before he remarked, in a low, reproachful voice, 'I thought we had made friends.'

'Did you?' said Lilian; 'I didn't.'

'But *why* not? What have I done? How can I help—well, I shall only make matters worse by saying more, I suppose; but I do think you are rather unmerciful and rather——'

'Rather what?' asked Lilian, standing still and facing him fiercely.

'I was going to say unwise; but never mind! I won't say that. Only may I remind you that it was I who brought Austin here, and that I have done everything in my power to serve him and you?'

This, at least, was undeniable, and she reflected with compunction that his charge of unwisdom was likewise scarcely open to refutation. It had been her fault, not his, that he had now practically avowed what both of them had known for a long time past. So she said:

'Oh, very well; we will call ourselves friends, then, if you like; though I doubt whether we shall ever hit it off together very well. Of course it goes without saying that Matthew and I are much indebted to you.'

It was not in the best of tempers that she parted from him on the doorstep; but she recovered herself before dinner-time, and she could not but acknowledge that his behaviour throughout the evening was exemplary. His contribution to the chorus of congratulation which greeted Matthew on the latter's return had the appearance of being as sincere as it was hearty; he had the good taste, too, to make no allusion, covert or otherwise, to the colloquy of which a part has been recorded above.

Nevertheless, there was now a secret—and a secret which must be kept—between her and Leonard Jerome. That was why she felt that it would be impossible for her to remain much longer at Bannock Lodge, and that was also one reason why the steady, persistent rain of the morrow filled her with despondency. Some of the men were leaving that morning; the others proposed to shoot, notwithstanding the weather; only Leonard, who was still

unwell, was peremptorily forbidden by his sister to accompany them.

'Whatever you do, don't leave me!' Lilian whispered to Matthew, while plans were being discussed after breakfast. 'Selfish I may be, but I decline to face a second whole day of Mr. Jerome. You must sacrifice yourself for once, and as soon as I can I shall get mamma out of this. It must be bad for her to be in such a cold, damp atmosphere. Indeed, she has begun to cough already.'

'Oh, we shall have the sun out again before nightfall, I dare say,' responded Matthew cheerfully. 'Meanwhile, I ask for nothing better than to be allowed to stay in the house and try to amuse you. What would you like to do? Shall we have a game of billiards?'

Lilian assented; and although it subsequently proved necessary to include Madame d'Aultran and Leonard in the game, she was not dissatisfied. After all, what was there to be so much afraid of? Matthew, for his part, was evidently afraid of nothing, and she endeavoured to admire, instead of being irritated with, his calm belief in everybody.

Madame d'Aultran, puffing out cigarette smoke and giving utterance to occasional witticisms of a *risqué* character, did most of the talking. She played a neat game, and, with Leonard for her partner, easily defeated the other couple. Every now and then excursions were made into the hall to tap the falling barometer and gaze out at the unbroken leaden sky; once or twice Lady Bannock looked in to see how her guests were getting on and to assure them audaciously that it never rained for twelve consecutive hours in the Highlands. But the time dragged on very slowly, and Lilian was beginning to wonder how on earth the afternoon was to be disposed of, when a servant came in with some message for Matthew, who at once laid down his cue and left the room. As he had not returned at the end of five minutes, Madame d'Aultran shrugged her shoulders and remarked:

'It is not ceremonious; but the charm of your English country life is its absence of ceremony. What is certain is that three people cannot play billiards together—perhaps even cannot talk together with the freedom that two of them would prefer. *Allons! je me sauve. Amusez-vous bien, mes enfants, et tâchez d'être sages!*'

The horrid little woman disappeared through the doorway,

with a parting grin, and for a moment Lilian thought of following her. But it seemed a little ridiculous to do that. From whom or from what was there any need for her to run away? So she stood her ground and said coolly:

‘Shall we begin another game? We can stop when Matthew comes back.’

Instead of making the reply that might have been expected of him, Leonard walked the whole length of the room and back again in silence. Then, halting in front of her, and looking straight into her eyes, he exclaimed abruptly, ‘Are you *sure*?’

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ faltered Lilian.

‘Yes; you know what I mean. Perhaps I ought not to say it; perhaps it is treacherous to say it—although Heaven knows I have been loyal enough up to now! Anyhow, I can’t help myself—I must ask you the question! Are you sure that you really love Austin? Are you sure that you have ever really loved him at all?’

When, as sometimes happens, ordinary intercourse is stripped on a sudden of ordinary conventional restrictions, we are all apt to become amazingly honest. This, of course, is not because we have any wish to be so, but simply by reason of our inability to adapt ourselves at a moment’s notice to novel and unforeseen conditions. Lilian completely lost her presence of mind and answered:

‘If I were not sure, you are the very last person in the world to whom I should confess it.’

‘Ah, then it is as I thought!’ he cried. ‘You don’t love him; you only like and admire him—as indeed I do too, for the matter of that. But it isn’t enough to like and admire your husband. At least, it can never be enough for *you*, and I am sure in your heart you feel that.’

Lilian, who had sunk down upon one of the long leather benches which surrounded the room, stared at him affrightedly. She seemed to have no answer to make; so he went on, with the more confidence:

‘I am not ashamed of speaking like this——’

‘You ought to be!’ she interjected quickly.

‘No; I should be ashamed of keeping silence. Ought I to let you wreck your whole life for an idea? I was going to say that I shouldn’t have ventured to speak as I am doing if you hadn’t betrayed yourself a dozen times in the course of the

last two days. You may have deceived others, you may even, for aught I know, have deceived yourself; but it isn't in your power to deceive a man who—well, it can do no harm to tell you what you know already—who loves you as passionately as I do.'

Lilian rose to her feet, not without an effort, and faced him unflinchingly. 'So this is what your friendship is worth,' said she; 'this is what you boasted of and expected to be thanked for! I suppose it never occurred to you that I would rather have died than come here if I had imagined for one moment that your only object was to put such an insult upon me.'

'Ah, but I think you must be very well aware that that was not my object,' he returned quietly. 'What had I to gain by insulting you, whom I love with all my heart and soul? When I asked my sister to invite you here and to invite Austin at the same time, I had no other wish than the very natural one to be put out of my pain as soon as possible. Shall I tell you the whole truth? I was convinced that you loved him, but I was not at all convinced that he loved you. I thought—and indeed I think still—that he was fond of you in a sort of elder-brotherly way; I knew he would make the best of husbands; but I was sure that, partly out of chivalry and partly out of indifference, he would never attempt to force himself upon you, against your mother's wish. And I wanted you to have what would make you happy. It seems to me that that is a sufficient excuse for what I did.'

Lilian's face had flushed and paled alternately during this speech. She now said: 'You are not excusing yourself for what you have done, but for what you say that you meant to do. Oh, why could you not leave us alone?'

'I have told you,' he answered. 'I soon saw what the truth was, and that changed everything. I give you my word of honour that I would have held my tongue up to the end if I could have gone on believing that the love was on your side; but——'

'Oh, your honour!'

'Yes, my honour. I don't admit that I have acted dishonourably, though I know it will be said that I have. Austin is my friend; but when it comes to be a question between Austin and you, he must go to the wall. I go further than that; I believe I am doing him an actual service by preventing you from marrying him on false pretences.'

Lilian broke out into an hysterical laugh. 'You are very

fortunate to be able to think so well of yourself,' said she; 'I wish you could give me your recipe! But you certainly go very far indeed when you take it for granted that you have prevented me from marrying the man to whom I am engaged. It is ingenious of you to suggest that he never cared for me; only I am not bound to believe that you are speaking the truth.'

'I didn't say that he had never cared for you; I said he had never really been in love with you. But that is nothing. What goes to the root of the whole matter is that you are not in love with him. Can you tell me that you are?'

Well, she tried to tell that falsehood—a falsehood which had been dear to her, which she had cherished, in spite of all, and which she had never until now admitted to be a falsehood—but her eyes dropped and the words refused to pass her lips. All she could say was, 'What right have you to cross-examine me?'

He caught her by both hands, and, bending forward, murmured a few passionate words which explained what, in his opinion, constituted his right. Perhaps it was a right; perhaps it must be acknowledged to be a right; perhaps two unmarried people who love one another ought not to allow anything or anyone to come between them. Yet it may be hoped that the majority of men would not have accepted Leonard Jerome's position as light-heartedly as he did.

'Don't be so troubled about it,' he said, five minutes later; 'it isn't nearly such a tragic business as you suppose. There will be a bad quarter of an hour for both of us; but that is a small price to pay for thirty or forty years of happiness, instead of misery.'

'Oh, you won't love me for thirty or forty years,' Lilian returned, shaking her head sorrowfully; 'if it is thirty or forty months of happiness that I am buying, that is the very outside. Besides, it isn't of myself, or of you either that I am thinking.'

'Well, you will see that Austin will take it coolly enough. It may be a shock to him, and I dare say it will; but I doubt whether he understands what love means. One feels like a brute; one can't help it—and yet all the time one knows that one isn't hurting him much.'

'He does care for me,' said Lilian.

'Yes; but not as *I* care for you—not as you wish to be cared for.'

That might be true, and, if so, it was her one excuse. She said as much, adding: 'I think he is too good for me; I think I

could have gone on loving him—because I did love him at first—if he hadn't always made me feel that he was such a long way above me. That objection doesn't apply to you,' she concluded, with a faint smile.

'Oh, I'm not Matthew Austin,' Leonard confessed readily; 'still I don't know that I am much worse than my neighbours. It is true that you have always treated me with apparent hatred and contempt; but wasn't that only because——'

'Don't!' she exclaimed, laying her finger on his lips; 'you make me feel as if I had been acting a part which anybody could have seen through. But it was not pretence; I really thought that I disliked and despised you. Even now I can't quite understand why you suspected what I never admitted to myself.'

Leonard laughed. 'When one honestly despises a man, one doesn't take the trouble to keep on telling him so,' he answered. 'All the same, I felt nothing approaching to certainty until yesterday, nor any sort of hope that I should ever be as happy as I am now until a few minutes ago.'

'You have no business to be happy,' Lilian began. 'I almost wish——'

But she started away from his side, without ending her sentence; for at this juncture the door was opened, and Matthew Austin walked in.

(To be continued.)

'VIA DOLOROSA ATLANTICA.'

R.M.S. 'Gigantic.' Wednesday.—We are lying snug and steady in the Alexandra Dock; the time is half-past nine in the evening. We should have left Liverpool at four. Outside the library in which I write you hear steps walking up and down the deck with the reverberations of a seaside pier in August. Inside, under the golden electric light, business men (good business men, I've no doubt, but ridiculous to a degree in Margate yachting caps) are frowning and writing, rustling flimsy paper, to catch the ten o'clock mail-bag. They are travellers for the great Anglo-American firms; they cross the Atlantic three or four times a year and call the stewards by their Christian names.

No one seems to know why we don't start; some say it's the tide's wrong, and some that it's too rough for us to cross the bar. The real reason I understand to be an accident to an American vessel, blown by the gale across the dock gates and at present barring our exit. Anyway, we are still as a rock against the quay side, while the booming wind that has swept the face of heaven clean and freshened to a joyous twinkling every February star, wreathes its thin shrill lips through our rigging with a high hooting cry, 'Come outside, you great coward, and I'll show you!'

We are all aboard, down to the last steerage passenger, with his high cheek-bones and worn fur cap, his flat, light-haired, freckled wife, tied up in a scarlet shawl; his rough, red, mottled-faced child, stamping about in a yellow fur coat, like a young Eskimo. When I strolled on shore before dinner, down the long dock-shed, flickering with gas and pungent with cases of onions, I met a youthful son of Erin staggering towards the New World with his bundle and flushed skin-full of whisky. He challenged us to fight, of course, 'Who's the next? Come on, both av ye!' and was assisted up the gangway by the dock policeman and a ragged compatriot selling the *Evening Mail*.

Downstairs—I beg pardon—below, my stout little steward wipes his polished dome of a forehead and advises me to go to bed now, before we get outside. In his trim white jacket he regards me benevolently, and his eyes twinkle at my assurance that I am a fearsome sailor, as though he had heard it often before. I suppose

he must ; he has been voyaging between Liverpool and New York for seventeen years. Seventeen years ! Why, he should know every wave and every seagull by sight.

As I sink between the rough and pleasant country-inn sheets of my berth I hear the lap of the water, the throbbing of a pump, and a drowsy voice from the next cabin that murmurs, 'What a lot of bolts . . . and rivets . . . spring mattress . . . George ?'

Thursday.—Still in the Alexandra Dock. A sailor, who tells me no one is allowed ashore, looks up at the shrill rigging and doesn't think the ranting, snoring gale is anyway abated. I go down to breakfast to the splendid gilded saloon (with an entirely unnecessary lurching, sailor-like walk), and find a type-written *menu*, a hand's length, crammed with every English and American delicacy. 'Clam chowder, corn cakes, buckwheat, hominy and cranberry jelly' make me feel as though Bartholdi's statue were already in sight.

On deck the day is windy-brilliant. The sky is Eton blue, and through the haze the white gulls circle tempestuously. The surface of the dock is occasionally lashed into wreaths of skurrying mist. Near me two business men in yachting caps, to whom nothing in the voyage or in nature are noticeable, talk earnestly and gustily I hear, 'stall-fed cattle . . . went right down to the bank, sir, and got it . . . if that had been all the money he had in the world, he couldn't 'a been tighter.'

Now it's 11.30 by the dock clock, and we're gradually lurching away from the Alexandra quay side. We pass the dock gates and out into the leaping river. Against the bright sunlight the houses and shore of New Brighton look black as a silhouette. The last I see of the Lancashire coast is the long dun sand-hills, patched with ragged grass blown into shapeless hummocks by the wind. Then, like sticks, the masts of a wreck. All round the hurricane deck tarpaulins are stretched ; they *flap-flap, flap!* monotonously ; they rumble with the dull thump of loosely stretched drums. As the *Gigantic* is still steady, passengers promenade briskly, and as they pass me in my deck-chair, I hear scraps of their conversation. A stout woman with a pinched waist, a brown ulster and a cap pinned over her streaming hair, asks, 'Has she any money *at all?*' Her companion, a wizened little man, dried up and brittle, in a shrunk covert-coat, answers disagreeably, 'Seventy pounds a year.' Droll, these fleeting scraps of conversation. I remember at South Kensington Station, only the other day, two men passing

me with heavy important tread while waiting for the train. 'If I survive my wife,' says one to the other solemnly, 'as I hope I shall.' *Cætera desunt*, for the train came in. But what a glimpse into a household!

All the early afternoon we get fairy views of the beautiful Welsh coast. Holyhead and its lighthouse look clear and sharp as in a water-colour drawing. From my deck-chair I begin to notice the beginning of acquaintanceships and flirtations. One of the most obvious is that of an elderly golden-haired lady, with deep-set twinkling eyes and the highly artificial figure of a dressmaker's mantle-hand, who walks the planks sharply with one of the travellers in yachting caps. He is the type of 'handsome swell' of a third-rate comic paper in its seaside summer number; he wears a serge suit, and, with his hands plunged in his jacket pockets and his sturdy *bourgeois* legs planted briskly down one after the other, he regards his companion with that fatuous air of the irresistible who has had much success among barmaids. The husband of the golden-haired lady sits playing poker in the smoking-room, where the company looks like that of the commercial parlour of a Manchester hotel, and the atmosphere resembles a blue fog.

As the *Gigantic* turns towards Queenstown the trembling and throbbing approach something more definite in the way of movement. I make up my mind to get shaved while I can. The barber, who is curled up asleep in his little shop, operates upon me deftly and informs me this is the one hundred and eighty-fifth time he has crossed the Atlantic. He charges a shilling for the shave and says I sha'n't get done in New York for that money. Then he turns with a low bow to the most important man on board, our Member of Parliament, who sits on the Captain's right in the saloon. If the poor gentleman's well enough he will be called on to preside at the concert that always takes place the last night. Indeed, he has the air, as he strolls about in his fur coat, of already considering his neat and appropriate remarks as chairman, or at least one of the many important social and political problems of the day. Possibly, however, I do him an injustice, and he is only wondering whether he is going to be sick.

Dinner is announced by a couple of sailor-boys marching about playing bugles. I find those bugles very trying in mid-Atlantic; they are tootled just outside my cabin door, and they seem to say: 'Get up and come into the saloon, my boy. There you'll find

meat and rich sauces and puddings and wine.' Even Sam, the steward, admits they sometimes have boots thrown at them. At dinner I observe the morose feeling growing stronger; my hair has a tendency to rise off my forehead, the *menu* seems absurdly, outrageously, disgustingly long. I am next rather a handsome girl who can't understand why I don't talk to her. She asks me to pass the salt, and when I do it in dreary silence she says, 'Thank you *very* much,' and looks me straight in the eyes. The table steward bends over me with the *menu* and presses more food on me. His voice sounds muffled as though it came from a telephone. I rise with a frown, I sway gently from side to side, the joints in my legs don't feel sufficient to meet the upward and downward movements of the deck. The talk and the laughter, the rattle of knives and forks grow fainter. I find myself in a narrow passage with a brass rail on one side and a limp fire-hose on the other. I say aloud fretfully, 'I want cabin 125.' In despair I open a door, any door: it's a bathroom. Fortunately I meet a boy carrying linen, from whom I demand Sam, my steward Sam. He says, 'Sam is at plates, mister.' That means Sam is assisting to wash-up. At last, cabin 125. The curtains, the coats, my dressing-gown are swinging from side to side. I throw my clothes off me as though they were all shirts of Nessus. I fall asleep, dully, heavily, like a drunken tramp under a haystack.

At one in the morning I wake to absolute silence and stillness. We are at Queenstown. I discover Sam has been in and fastened a tin arrangement, very like the *tronc pour les pauvres* outside a Catholic church, on to the edge of the berth. *Très commode, ça*. At three I wake again and find we are leaving Queenstown. Sam, who looks in upon me, replies to my inquiries as to whether it isn't very rough, 'Well, the wind's been here before us.'

Friday.—Sam opens the portholes, and, leaning one fat hand on the edge of my berth, asks how I am. In a strangled voice I reply that I am wretched. His consolation is that he will see me again presently. The bugles blow for breakfast; I hear the water going into the bath, loud voices, somebody who whistles the 'Pinafore.' The sea gushes into the glass cap of the portholes and gushes out again; gushes in and gushes out. A basket-work chair advances from the other side of the cabin, meets a port-manteau, and retires. My tooth-brush rattles in the glass, bottles fall. I doze.

Sam comes in carrying a little basin of chicken-broth and

some crackers. He says it's half-past eleven. I stare at him stupidly when he mentions crackers. I think of a Christmas party and my dear small nephews and nieces. But crackers are only pallid-looking biscuits, to escape from which I put my head under the clothes. Sam sighs and says he will see me again presently. Surely I told him to take away the chicken-broth? I know I tried to. Doze.

The bugles blow for lunch—for dinner. The 'Pinafore' whistler sings the curate's song in the next cabin as he blithely dresses. The sea gushes and hisses in and out of the portholes; the curtains of my berth sway over my face and brush it. I ring the electric bell for Sam to come and close the portholes and shut out that horrible gushing sea. The boy comes in and says Sam is at plates. I try to throw into my glance an order to close the portholes. Far down under the bed-clothes a strange voice says 'portholes.' The boy looks at me alarmed and says: 'Sam will see me presently.'

In the middle of the night I wake with a baked, parched thirst. I ring the bell and a strange man enters in a dark flannel shirt. By my directions he gives me an effervescing drink. He makes it too strong and it fizzes over my face and hair deliciously. He says it is two o'clock, and blowing pretty hard. I look at my watch and find it's twenty past three. That's the worst of going west; the nights are all the longer. I hear the sea boiling up into the port-holes like a witch's cauldron. I slide from side to side in my berth and have to grip the edge to prevent myself from falling out. 'Yes,' says the strange man, 'she's rolling.'

Saturday.—As I follow the motion of the ship, I cannot help thinking of a country road that climbs and dips and falls, turns corners, rumbles and bumps over ruts and unmended spaces; stops for a minute or two to let the horse-power breathe and then dashes on again wildly, whip-bethwacked. I fancy myself in a shaky, weak old chaise; I am driving from Devizes to Marlborough over the downs; the road is very bad, there are huge stones and long raw places. As we sway and slide along, I build up beside our path Wiltshire farmhouses and villages. We stop for one trembling, suspended moment opposite a Cold Harbour I know. There is a damp-stained blue paper in the parlour, blue horse-men are leaping blue fences, some of them are cut in half by the corner china-closets. Outside a horn blows; it is that raketty young Pike with his tandem. Chalker, the farmer, enters to

look at me, with his little eyes and long teeth. No, it's Sam, steadying himself with the door-handle, and young Pike's horn is the bugle for breakfast. Sam has an orange stuck on a fork, the skin and the white all cut away, the juice dripping. 'Dare I?' Sam opens the portholes and says, 'It's a nasty morning again.' The sea boils up into the portholes like milk into a saucepan.

I notice that the voices in the corridor and from the neighbouring cabins are stronger, more cheerful. Sam says all his gentlemen are up with the exception of one next door, who spends the day making noises, each more complicated than the last. Sam says he wouldn't be so bad if he didn't think himself so well and eat so much. Why doesn't he imitate me? Yesterday I broke a biscuit in half. To-day I suck an orange.

All day long I doze, doze confusedly. There are times in ocean voyages, I am sure, when these great ships strike and roll over marine monsters taking their ease near the surface. Often and often I felt the *Gigantic* strike something, struggle for a few moments with a body, vast and pulpy; either cut its way through it, or rise above and along it, and then go free again through the unresisting waves. Frequently I was sure I heard screams and dolorous cries of anguish. It was just as though we had run over some one in the street. Perhaps these vessels that are lost and never heard of again (the *City of Boston*, for instance, which they suppose destroyed by an iceberg) are in reality smashed and devoured by the revolt and combination of outraged furious monsters who have borne the mutilation and death of their nearest and dearest long enough.

Sam visits me later in the interminable day with milk and lime water; to strengthen the stomach, he says. No use, my good Sam; *je ne puis pas le retenir*. Steps, bugles, voices, the man who sings 'Ta-ra-ra-boom de ay' while he gets ready for dinner, the man who comes down late from the smoking-room and undresses noisily.

Sunday.—Sam suggests I should see the doctor. The doctor comes rolling and lurching into my cabin after the half-past ten Church of England service in the saloon. He, too, has had seventeen years of voyaging to and fro; it took him two months, he says, to get over his sea-sickness, so I can scarcely complain of my three days. He is an Irishman of the jovial type of Charles Lever's doctors, with a brogue one might cut with a silver knife. He demands my tongue, and when, with an immense effort, I

show it to him, 'Oi wish oi'd got wan so clane,' says he, regretfully. He orders me milk and lime water and a visit on deck, neither of which prescriptions I have the faintest idea of obeying. He tumbles out of my cabin like an amateur actor pretending to be extremely drunk, and I fall again to intermittent dozing.

In the afternoon I am seized with a passionate desire to see the face of this restless, storm-lashed Atlantic. I begin by sitting up in my berth for the first time for three days. My head feels full of molten, swimming, clanging lead; my legs, on the other hand, as I dangle them impotently over the side of my berth, are as pieces of string. I fall on my knees, grown leaden now instead of my head (which feels light and bobbing as a cork), and with the help of the basket-work chair which slides to my aid, drag myself like a shot rabbit to the opposite berth below the portholes. How high above me it seems, and now how low! Up I clamber and look out through the gushing, boiling porthole. Waves, green and curling; hollows, slabs, terraces, troughs of water, broken and tumbling. White ridges and manes, and vast deep pits where the sea appears clean sliced into polished sides of the richest verd-antique. Not a ship, nor a bird; only the low grey sky, with its masses of slowly shifting cloud; only the grandiose, breaking seas. Tempestuous as the seascape is, its very silence strikes me as ominous. It is like watching a man in a fit of dumb, inarticulate rage. It reminds me of seeing people dance, through a window, when you don't hear the music.

In the evening Sam persuades me to sit in the basket-work chair while he makes my bed. I sit in it in a limp heap, like Irving in the last act of Louis XI. Sam entertains me, meanwhile, with stories of vessels which break their machinery when (just as we are) three days out; the rest of the voyage is made laboriously under sail, and lasts three weeks. Also he tells me of suicides (they had one for each of their first five voyages) and burials, not at all uncommon. He winds up with an account of a commercial gentleman in the next cabin who had *delirium tremens* all last voyage and required a strait waistcoat, Sam, and three supernumeraries to keep him quiet.

I wake at six in the morning to find a strange man on his knees moving his hands mysteriously over the floor. He says he is searching for my boots to clean them. He describes it as a nasty morning again and bitterly cold.

Monday afternoon.—However Sam managed to get me up on deck, I don't know. To me it was like stumbling about inside a kaleidoscope, every object going through a constant shifting and wondrous sea-change. I have a recollection of his holding me by the arm and sliding me into a deck-chair. Now, he says, the deck-steward will see after me. When he leaves me I feel as though I have lost my only friend on board, and that I am about to shed the bitterest tears of my life. I open my eyes and see a sailor in a sou'-wester dropping a thermometer overboard and pulling it up again to examine the temperature of the water. That is, I believe, to discover whether there be icebergs in the neighbourhood.

Then comes to me the deck-steward. He produces the *menu* from his inside jacket-pocket and holds it under my nose. I look at it blankly and drearily. I see beef and mutton and things fricasséed. Then I look at him and his dumb entreating eye. My white lips murmur something inarticulate; neither of us speaks, but, thank heaven, he understands me and goes.

Healthy, hearty people walk sturdily up and down the deck, talking and laughing. I get hideous whiffs of their tobacco, and the end of my deck-chair is occasionally knocked in a way that moves me to blind fury. If I had a gun handy, there are two young men I should certainly shoot. They wear Norfolk jackets and flannel trousers, they appear to enjoy the cold and the motion, the wind envelopes me with occasional clouds of the horrible mixture they are puffing at. I try to attract the attention of the captain, who is walking up and down with a pretty girl, assuring her he will get her to New York on Thursday afternoon; I have an idea that he will put those two young men in irons if I ask him to, properly.

The deck is so bitterly cold that, to avoid being frozen and affecting the thermometer which the man in the sou'-wester pulls up and down and examines carefully every half hour, I drag myself miserably into the library. The library (owing perhaps to the quantity of light literature it contains) is even more unsteady than the deck. I close my eyes and listen to two American girls chaff a fat young Dutchman in a yachting cap and a reach-me-down mackintosh with capes. He amuses them so much that they carry him off down to the saloon for afternoon tea.

I feel that if I don't speedily get below again I shall disgrace myself and my good friend Sam. I have a vision as I lurch along

cabin-wards of leaping brass handrails and a long twining fire-hose, twisting like an empty snake. Fortunately, Sam is sitting in the passage amusing himself with a highly coloured American comic paper. I fall shuddering into his arms; he undresses me like a child and puts me back into the familiar berth. He looks at me mournfully, and says he will see me again presently.

Tuesday.—Nothing but shipwreck will induce me to rise, and even then I shall insist on being the last person to leave the vessel. The doctor looks at me and says to Sam, 'Fwhat shall we do to get um on deck? Shall we put powder under um?'

All day long I lie and read, not unpleasantly. I have 'Half Hours of the best American Authors,' which I took out of the library before we started, and Hardy's 'Return of the Native,' bought at Crewe. What years ago it seems since we left London in the special, since I jumped out at Crewe and bought the book. How like a dream it seems to recall the two French people sitting opposite in the luncheon car, the woman with her vivacious monkey face, cunning and shrewd, but not unpleasant; the man, handsome and sulky, with his common hands and thick legs. I set her down as a *trapézienne*, and he as the strong man who stands below steadying the rope, watching her gyrations with affected palpitations of terror. She read 'Belle-maman' when she was not quarrelling with him, and he had a crumpled copy of 'Gil Blas.' And the American ladies, in diamond earrings and tight sealskin jackets, chattering of the London shops and hotels while the pleasant English landscape slid past, with the ploughing teams on the brown uplands, the solitary figures trudging along the roads, the broad fields greenly shimmering with the winter wheat. And the wind in Liverpool, yelling through the docks, and the first sight of the *Gigantic*; and the sheaf of kindly telegrams waiting in the box in the saloon; and the steward, looking in his Eton jacket like a huge schoolboy, marking off our places for dinner and handing us each a number. How far off they all seem to me now tumbling in mid-Atlantic, how far off and yet how clear.

Wednesday.—As I stand looking at the sea, with a faint, wavering smile, a gentleman in a heavy ulster and a cap says cheerfully, 'You've had a very bad time, haven't you?' He introduces himself as the man who suffered so much in the next cabin. His face is plaster-white and tightly drawn; his eyebrows have gone up into his hair; his eyes are criss-crossed with a tangle of pre-

mature wrinkles. Really, if I looked like that, I should conceive it my duty to remain in my berth till I improved.

As I haven't been shaved since last Thursday, I tumble below (I am rapidly getting my sea-legs now) with a sort of sham hearty 'Come aboard, sir!' air, down into the barber's shop. There I find our Member of Parliament, who addresses me remarks of the courteous-foolish order. He appears to be one of those gentlemen (not altogether uncommon in the House of Commons) who mistake dullness for weight, and slowness of speech for evidence of sagacity. Like Mr. Chick, he believes in making an effort when on board ship; he never gives way, he says; he forces himself to get up on deck; he forces himself down into the saloon to eat. Which, being interpreted, simply means he isn't seasick; for if any man tells me the trouble can be overcome by mere strength of will, I have no hesitation in proclaiming him liar, of the second or self-deceived order.

When I am in the barber's chair, facing me in the glass I find a thin, white old man, with a short, dark beard, a stubby moustache, a blank, hollow eye, a wrinkled forehead. When I turn my head I see who it is; the object does the same; he mimics all my gestures; he gets shaved, just as I do. When I look up at the barber for an explanation of the phenomenon, he says in a guttural German-American tone, 'Well, I never tink I see you again. You look pretty sick, mein goodness!'

In the afternoon, as the day grows finer, I venture down into the saloon for a cup of tea. The sun blazes in upon the gilding, lavish as a Lord Mayor's barge. There is a group round the piano, practising for the concert. A young man in a light suit and a dull penny-reading baritone moans through 'In Days of Old when Knights were Bold.' He goes through the song three times, and each time misses the high note by half a tone. He doesn't seem to have a notion he's flat, though the lady accompanying him hits the right note significantly. There are good people, I believe, who will sing flat in heaven without any idea that they are spoiling the general harmony.

But, after all, how absurd it seems to complain of three or four days' sea-sickness when one remembers what people must have suffered in the old days of sailing vessels and paddle steamers; how unmanly, when on the *Gigantic* one is surrounded with every attention and comfort, even luxury, and when one knows that in other parts of the ship the old, the sickly, the

badly clothed and badly fed are suffering a thousand times more, without a single comfort or attention to alleviate their misery. I stood upon the narrow bridge that runs above the part of the ship given over to the steerage passengers, and looked down upon them, grouped about in the chilly dusk and in the light that fell from their saloon-door. Bare-headed women, wrapped in shawls like factory girls, came and went busily with tin pannikins; gaunt men like drovers stood about talking and quarrelling; children tied up in shawls ran backwards and forwards, screamed at by their mothers as they stand screaming at their frowsy Whitechapel doors. A cook came out in his white jacket and threw a paper of sawdust over the side. The wind carried the sawdust back like a cloud among the women and children, and I saw a mother cover her child's eyes quickly with her hands, caring nothing for herself, anxious only to protect her child. In front of the door an old woman was sitting on a tin box, uncared for and unnoticed. The light fell on her face, ravaged by care, and age, and sickness. It was, perhaps, the first time she had ventured out to take the air since leaving Liverpool, and she sat there, like a weather-beaten statue, out of which time and trouble had gradually worn all semblance to joy, to life, and even hope. Age, and exile, and sickness, every human misery seemed to beat its bat-wings round that impassive suffering face. Later in the evening when again I looked down from the bridge, she was still sitting there, alone.

Thursday.—Land-ho! It's half-past eleven, and Fire Island is in sight. I look out of the library window and see a long, low, sandy shore, just like the last I saw of Lancashire, only that it is patched and painted with snow. I see a lighthouse, from whence they will telegraph our arrival to New York, and a wreck, heaped broken among the sand-dunes. We don't go very fast because of the fog; we keep blowing our great horn like a Triton, but we expect to be at the quay-side at five o'clock. Lunch is really rather a pleasant meal on board these huge Atlantic liners. The Member of Parliament hopes with a conciliatory smile I am 'none the worse for my resurrection.' He regards me as he regards everyone else on board—as a constituent, a possible voter, some one to be won over by the irresistible charm of his manner. The pretty American girl opposite remarks pointedly, 'It's vurry strange how folk turn up on board at the last moment whom one hasn't noticed before.' That's said partly for fear that I should

flatter myself I had been noticed, and partly in revenge for a smile I couldn't help our first evening at some rather startling Americanism of hers. The table steward talks to me in the low cooing voice one uses to an invalid; he calls me by my name (no one says 'sir' on the *Gigantic*), and brings me the *menu* every two minutes. My handsome neighbour gives me an account of her sufferings (nothing to mine), and presses on me a *lemon soufflé* she and her companion have had specially made. They seem to travel in considerable luxury, for their last act before leaving Liverpool was the purchase of a number of chickens for their private consumption *en route*.

How fast the last hours on board fly in compensation for others so torturingly slow. Here's Staten Island and New York Harbour; here's the *George P. Flick*, a ferry boat ornamented with a large gilt eagle, lumbering alongside, and bringing a Customs House officer in a peaked cap. He reminds me I have a fan and a silver box to smuggle. I dispose them about my person with considerable trepidation, and go down into the saloon to sign a paper declaring I have nothing dutiable in my luggage. No more I have; they are both in my pockets. I regard with interest the Customs House officer, the first American I have seen on native soil, and can scarcely answer his questions for staring. He is a handsome weary man, exactly like one of Leech's Volunteer officers of 1860, and he writes rapidly, holding the pen between the first and second fingers.

There's Bartholdi's gigantic statue at last, and there are the piers and swing of Brooklyn Bridge. Sam has fastened up all my luggage, and we shake hands heartily. I shall never forget him and the oranges he brought me, stuck on a fork.

As I go down the gangway a crowd of faces look up at me from the dock. A twinkling Irishman darts at me with a telegraph form and a pencil; he leaves them with me with a sweet, wistful smile, and rushes away after others. My luggage is all waiting for me under my initial in the huge shed; I have to open every trunk and bag, and watch large dirty hands play over my clean linen. Sam comes to shake hands with me again, and gets me an Irishman and a truck to take my luggage to a fly. An Irishman opens the door, an Irishman drives me; the first shop I see is Michael Feeney's saloon bar.

I drive jolting over tramway lines, under elevated railways, between piles of snow as high as the early walls of Rome. I see

an unmistakable Irish policeman, in a helmet with a turned-down brim, regarding with admiration a coloured lady sauntering through the slush of the sidewalk in goloshes. We are nearly smashed by a cable-car slinking along, ringing a funereal clanging bell. I see a disused lamp-post, with a dark red letter-box fastened to it; next, a tall, black, electric light pole. On the lamp-post I read, on one side, *Fifth Avenue*; on the other *East 26th Street*. On the top of a huge building there's a huge sky-sign, 'Admiral Cigarettes, Opera Lights.' On the face of it three large clocks tell the time in London, New York, and Denver. As we jolt past, up Fifth Avenue, I read on a board, 'Oh, mamie, won't you take your honey boy to see Peter F. Dailey in "A Country Sport?"' This is New York.

COMMISSIONS IN THE GERMAN ARMY.

To the Teutonic youth whose aspirations are fixed on the military red collar, which is the distinguishing mark of a German officer, various paths lie open for the gratification of his ambition, all of which differ materially from those in vogue in our own service. With us in England, except in a very few instances, admission lies through a competitive examination, and it would perhaps be difficult to devise any other scheme to meet the necessities of our peculiar position. Having but a small army compared with continental forces, we require only a very limited number of officers, whereas there is always forthcoming an unlimited supply of young men of means ambitious of holding her Majesty's commission. In Germany the conditions are reversed, and the demand being in excess of the supply, no resort need be had to competition. Again, with the single exception of the man who rises from the ranks, no British officer is obliged to have any personal experience of service therein. The reverse is the rule in Germany. The youth who has finally decided on a military career must, first and foremost, look out for a regimental commander willing to accept him, and it behoves him to be early in so doing. Notwithstanding the dearth of applicants, it is by no means a matter of course that every application will be granted. A wide discretion is left to commanding officers, and social relations and family antecedents are strictly inquired into. There is, besides, a searching medical examination. The army candidate, having found a regiment, is not permitted to join it immediately, unless he is fortunate enough to hold a certificate of having stood the test of the *Abiturienten* examination. This is the term applied to the final passing-out examination at one of the recognised public schools, which must be passed by all students prior to their admission to a university. The examination embraces theology, German, Latin, Greek, French, English, Hebrew, mathematics, physics, history, and geography, and the standard is so high that very few but university students attain it. For the general run of candidates a special literary test, known as the *Fahnrichs* (ensign) examination, is imposed, and this is by far the most popular door of admission. It very much resembles our own army entrance, and, as in England, so also in Germany,

there is a host of crammers, all of whom profess to offer the best possible advantages and to have won more successes than any of their rivals. The business is supposed to be lucrative, though we are not prepared to suggest that the profits rise to the level of those of our own English army tutors. The Berlin crammer must be satisfied with moderate fees, but his teaching is nevertheless methodical and expeditious. He seldom finds it necessary to spend more than three months on the preparation of a candidate. But this is not altogether due to the excellence of his system, for admission to the examination is conditional on the production of a certificate of having reached the head class in a public school, which is a guarantee of a high standard of previous knowledge. It is true that this certificate may be dispensed with by the special permission of the Emperor, but such exemptions are the exception and not the rule.

Once the date of the examination is fixed, the candidate receives from his regiment a notification of the time when he has to present himself before the Military Examination Commission in Berlin. This is almost invariably at twelve o'clock on a Sunday. On his arrival, which must be punctual, he is introduced along with the other candidates, of whom there are about thirty, to the President of the Commission. From this moment he is treated as a soldier, and instructions are given to him which he has to obey to the letter. During the examination he resides, under military supervision, on the premises where it is held; and when it is over, and he is discharged, he is obliged forthwith to quit the city. The examination begins on Monday morning at 8 A.M., when the candidates appear in evening dress and white gloves, invariably the attire worn at all important public examinations in Germany. The event is regarded as solemn, and on all such occasions the swallow-tail is indispensable. By Wednesday evening the written examination is generally over, and the *vivâ voce* test begins. This lasts till Friday evening, and immediately upon its close the result is communicated to each candidate. He who has been lucky enough to pass, receives a military railway ticket to the garrison where his regiment is stationed. Here we will leave him for the present while we endeavour more fully to describe the Fahnrichs examination, and to indicate the requisite standard of knowledge in the various subjects which it embraces.

The examination in mathematics is confined to geometry, about equal to the first six books of Euclid; algebra up to geometrical

progression, and very elementary plane trigonometry. In German two essays are set, and an accurate acquaintance with the history of the literature of the country, as well as of grammar and prosody, is required; obligatory Latin does not reach farther than Cæsar and Livy, the latter with the assistance of a dictionary, with easy questions on grammar and syntax, but the candidate is permitted to offer Cicero and Horace in addition. In French two passages for translation are given, one from French into German and the other *vice versâ*, and questions on grammar are asked. Great importance is attached to correct pronunciation, and above all to fluency in conversation. English alternates with Greek, the standard in the former being about the same as in French, and in the latter the same as in Latin. History includes (1) that of Greece and Rome; (2) that of the Middle Ages; (3) modern history, English, French, German, and Russian; (4) Prussian history. In each division two parallel questions are set, one of which must be correctly answered. Geography embraces physical, political, and mathematical geography, and the examination takes place on the same lines as in history. There is in addition an examination in a third modern language, chemistry, physics, or drawing, at the choice of the candidate. The highest mark in each subject is nine; the lowest is one. The marks obtained in the chief subjects (German, mathematics, and Latin) are multiplied by five; those obtained in the other obligatory subjects (French, Greek, or English, history, and geography) are multiplied by three, while those of the last category remain as they stand, except that to count at least five must be scored. The pass mark is 126, but the candidate is nevertheless disqualified who fails to make more than three in German—a result which orthographical mistakes entail. Those who fail are put back for three, five, seven, &c., months, depending on the number of marks short of the press standard. A candidate is then examined only in those subjects in which he has failed to obtain five, and it rarely happens that he is disqualified a second time. A third examination is only allowed by special permission.

We return to the candidate who, having passed his Fähnrichs examination, has been sent to his regiment. He is now a common soldier, and is obliged to live in barracks, where his treatment differs in no respect from that of the other privates, except, perhaps, that he is allowed to pay a comrade to perform for him the more menial part of his duties. After a few weeks' experience of barrack

life he is permitted to take private lodgings, and in due course is promoted to corporal. After five months' service he applies for a certificate of efficiency in practical soldiering, and if this, which must be signed by the commander and officers of the regiment, is granted, the title of 'Fähnrich,' or, more properly, 'Portepeefähnrich,' is conferred on him by an imperial order. As Fähnrich he ranks between corporal and sergeant, and receives an increase of pay. When he has completed a period of six months' service in the ranks, the Fähnrich removes to a military college. Here he is instructed in tactics, army organisation, the military epistolary style, the use of arms, fortification, &c.; he is taught gymnastics, fencing, riding, and swimming, and he receives lessons in Russian and French. The course lasts thirty-six weeks, and at its close the Fähnrich is eligible to present himself for examination in the military subjects included within it. Should he be successful, he returns to his regiment, whereupon he must undergo the ordeal of an election or rejection, as the case may be, by the officers of the same. The youngest records his vote first, the commander last, no ballot being employed. Should the result give a unanimous vote in favour of the Fähnrich, he is declared elected, and in due time receives the Emperor's commission. An unfavourable minority are obliged to state the grounds of their objection. These are referred to the Emperor, and on his decision as to their validity depends the result. Rejection by a majority is final; no reasons are assigned, and the rejected candidate will find it a difficult task to procure admission into any other regiment.

Another common way of entering the army is through a cadet school. They are mainly intended for the education of officers' sons, but to the extent of the available accommodation they are open to others. The programme of study is identical with that in the lower forms at public schools, the work of the higher forms being pursued at the chief cadet school at Lichterfelde. The cadets who are successful at the final passing-out examination are divided into two groups. The first hundred, or thereabouts, are granted exemption from service in the ranks and are not obliged to study at a military college. In lieu thereof they remain a year longer at Lichterfelde, which is devoted to preparation for the examination in military subjects, at which they are then eligible themselves. They afterwards receive their commissions without an election by the officers of the regiment to which they are appointed. Those who do not pass out among the first hundred

at Lichterfelde are distributed as common soldiers through different regiments, and eventually become officers by the same steps as those who enter through the Fähnrichs examination. We have seen that those cadets who pass out high are relieved of service in the ranks, but there is not, so far as we are aware, any other gate by which this may be avoided with the following exception: Young men who hold a certificate of having passed the Abiturienten examination, already referred to, and who have studied at least a year at a German University, Technical High School, or Forest Academy, may be admitted to the examination in military subjects without having either served in the ranks or studied at a military college. The general effect, therefore, of the regulations on this point is to render it obligatory on all military candidates, with the exception of those who are decidedly above the average in respect of education, to submit to a short probationary training on equal terms with the men whom they are afterwards destined to command.

As it is the fashion to take the German army as the type of military excellence, it is interesting to note how totally their system of admission differs from our own. We have already remarked on the variation in the matter of competition and of service in the ranks, but the comparison may be pursued into the nature of the entrance examinations. So far as mathematics or the dead languages are concerned there is no great difference beyond this, that the English standard is decidedly higher. In history the contrast is more apparent. The German authorities consider it essential to the education of an officer that he should be well up in the history of the chief European nations as well as in that of the Middle Ages, and of ancient Greece and Rome, whereas a general knowledge of his own is deemed enough for a British officer, and not even this is compulsory. The difference of opinion between the English and German Commissioners on the relative importance of the literature of their own and of other countries is very remarkable, the latter subjecting their candidates to a searching examination on the history of literature, the grammar and the prosody of their own language, whereas the former regard German etymology and the rules of French versification as more important than the literature of the English language. The value attached to a colloquial knowledge of modern languages affords, perhaps, a still more striking contrast. It is true that under the German scheme such knowledge is not

obligatory, but, in the words of a well-known German crammer, 'even a modest attempt at conversation always insures a high mark.' One-tenth of the possible total in either language is all that our own Civil Service Commissioners assign to proficiency in conversation.

There is, moreover, a wide divergence in the rules of the two countries which fix the age at which a candidate is admissible to the literary test, the German being eligible up to the age of twenty-three, whereas the English maximum is nineteen. The English service is open to all comers of unblemished character, but the discretion possessed by regimental commanders in the admission of military students, and the subsequent election which places it in the power of a single officer to raise an objection which may prove fatal, practically closes the German army to all but members of that class with which militarism is a profession, and from which officers have been for generations almost exclusively recruited.

UNCLE ONESIMUS.

It was when we were both at school that I first heard of Uncle Onesimus, as Clayton always called him. Clayton was a curly-haired little fellow whom most of us liked. We were great friends, though he was in the Lower Third form and I in the Upper Fifth and meditating the purchase of my first razor. Perhaps a good deal of Clayton's general popularity was due to his plentiful possession of pocket-money and the liberal way in which he expended it on the purchase of comestibles. I had myself passed the raspberry-tart stage of school existence; but there are other dainties, and, when I had helped Clayton in his early efforts at elegiac verse and rewritten his sentences from 'Arnold,' I was not too proud to accept offered refreshment.

After a time I learned that Clayton's pecuniary prosperity was due to frequent remittances from 'Uncle Onesimus.'

'He's awfully rich, you know,' Clayton said to me one day confidentially, 'and he lives in New York.'

'It's very nice to have a rich uncle,' I said sententiously.

'Oh, he's not really my uncle, you know,' the boy said. 'I only call him so. He was a great friend of my father's when he was alive. And one evening he came to our house and I had gone to bed—I was quite a little fellow then, you know—and he came up to my bedroom and looked at me while I was asleep, and stood looking at me ever so long and I didn't wake up. Mrs. Higgins—she was my nurse—a sort of nurse, you know—told me all about it. He went away the same night, and my father went away with him. And when my father came back he brought me a box of figs and a whole lot of playthings, and told me they came from a great friend of his and that I must write a letter and thank him.'

'What's his real name?' I asked carelessly.

Clayton laughed.

'Potts,' he said, 'and he's got such a funny lot of Christian names—Onesimus Washington Brutus Cæsar. I always write to him, "Dear Uncle Onesimus," because my father told me to.'

One day, two terms later, Clayton told me that Uncle Onesimus was coming over to Europe.

'He'll come down here,' he said, 'and get me a half-holiday. And perhaps he'll take me to London. Would you like to go too, Baywick?'

I expressed a dignified assent, as became one newly promoted to the Sixth.

'I've often written to him about you,' Clayton went on. 'I've told him you're my best friend, and that you've saved me ever so many lickings.'

Clayton got quite excited as the time for the expected visit drew near, and I think almost everyone in the school knew when the boat that was bringing Uncle Onesimus arrived at Queenstown. Then, one day, just after morning school, Clayton came running up to me with beaming face.

'He's come!' he cried out, 'and I've just been sent for. I'm sure he'll ask for you, and we'll go up to London and have a stunning good time. You'll come, won't you, Baywick?'

He ran off with shining face, while I reflected that an afternoon in London with the pleasant prospect of a good dinner at the close was more alluring than 'The Seven against Thebes.'

Clayton came back in about fifteen minutes, looking very crestfallen.

'What's the matter, young 'un?' I said. 'Isn't Uncle Onesimus going to take you up to town?'

'Oh yes,' he replied, 'and he wants to take you too. But——'

He hung down his head, and something like a blush was visible on his cheeks. At last, with a great burst, the revelation came.

'Uncle Onesimus is a black man,' he said—'a real nigger.' He shot a rapid glance at me.

'Do you mind it very much, Baywick? Some of the other fellows have seen him, and they'll tease me dreadfully about it. But if you come up——' Something like a tear hung in the little fellow's blue eyes.

'He's asked us for dinner,' he added, 'and the Doctor's given us leave.'

I acceded with due impressiveness, and was led off to see Mr. O. W. B. C. Potts—otherwise 'Uncle Onesimus.' He was a full-blooded negro—a tall, massively built man, verging towards greyness. He was most carefully and faultlessly dressed; he wore

gold-rimmed spectacles, and had a thick cane with a big gold knob. He greeted me with an air of benevolent dignity, and he gained at once a high place in my consideration by addressing me as 'Mr. Baywick,' the dignity of the prefix being a quite unaccustomed honour.

We were soon flying up to London. Clayton was quite relieved to see that Uncle Onesimus and I got on so well, and prattled merrily. The old man smiled good-humouredly at his boyish talk, but just before we got into London he shook his head for a moment and put on a grave and magisterial air.

'There's one thing I clean forgot,' he said. 'I didn't ask you any questions about your work. Have you gotten on well with your studies?'

And then ensued a few minutes of oral examination. Uncle Onesimus began with arithmetic, in which Clayton certainly didn't distinguish himself. He did better in Latin, however, for he was able to tell Mr. Potts the English of *E pluribus unum* and *Sic semper tyrannis*. That good man beamed benignantly through his gold-rimmed spectacles, and said that there were one or two things more he would like to ask him in Latin, but he couldn't remember them just then. A little later Clayton was floored again, for he didn't know the meaning of the name 'Onesimus,' and he couldn't say in which book of the Bible it occurred. Pressed on the point, he hazarded the first book of Samuel, whereat Uncle Onesimus shook his head gravely and looked at me. I was able to set Clayton right on both points, and I think I rose some little in the old man's opinion by elaborate etymology, parading all the parts of the verb *ὀνίζημι*.

'I never heard it so well explained before,' he said.

Our arrival at the terminus stopped further examinations, and Uncle Onesimus proceeded to give us a good time, as he said.

He had taken a box at the pantomime, which was then in mid-career, and after that was over we went round to a jeweller's, where he bought a scarf-pin for Clayton, and consulted me as to what sort of watch would be likely to please a young friend of his about my own age. We finished with a dinner in which I made my first acquaintance with French cooking and drank my first glass of Pommery and Greno.

When we were returning, Uncle Onesimus accompanied us to the station. He put Clayton into the carriage, and drew me aside.

'You'll be a friend to him, won't you?' he said, pointing

towards the boy with his broad black thumb. 'He's young, and where there's such a lot of boys he might get into mischief.'

Two days afterwards I received by post the watch which I had chosen for the friend about my own age.

Uncle Onesimus went back to New York, and I didn't see him again for more than a year. Then I was invited to spend the Easter holidays with him and Clayton. Clayton had been doing well at school, and had been able to show a good 'report.' Uncle Onesimus gave me some of the credit of this, and I had really looked after my young charge pretty well and seen that he didn't waste his time as completely as nine boys out of ten do at an English public school. The Easter holiday was a reward for both of us, for Uncle Onesimus laid himself out to make us enjoy ourselves thoroughly. Every day he found something for us to see: he had evidently studied up the guide-books to London and laid his plans beforehand. Then there were the theatres—how I enjoyed them then! And we always had the best seats procurable, and Uncle Onesimus would look round and say between the acts:

'Do you like this piece? Are you comfortable? Or would you like to go somewhere else?'

And the dinners too!—we visited all the best restaurants in London. Uncle Onesimus would send his valet round to secure a good table, and I remember the air of *empressement* with which we were always received. The head waiter would usher us to our seats with the most obsequious politeness, and listen to Uncle Onesimus's orders with a deferential attention wonderful to see. And every now and then during the dinner Uncle Onesimus would gleam at us through his gold-rimmed spectacles and say:

'Do you like what you are having? Are you comfortable?'

One or two incidents stand out with especial distinctness. Clayton had been asked where he would like to go, and had suggested the Christy Minstrels. We went there in due course, and the boy was delighted with the singing and dances, and with the venerable jokes of 'Mr. Johnson.' Glancing at Uncle Onesimus, I saw that he was looking on with an aspect of settled and unmoved gravity which was quite unusual with him. Clayton saw it too, and was surprised. He glanced once or twice dubiously at the old man's face; then an idea struck him.

'Oh, Uncle Onesimus,' he cried out, 'I'm sure you don't like this. I'm *so* sorry I came here. Shall we go away directly? I would like to!'

Uncle Onesimus beamed for a moment tenderly on his little friend.

'Why no, Harry,' he said, 'we may as well see it out.'

Before the performance was over Clayton was laughing as merrily as ever, and Uncle Onesimus smiled responsively, but as we were going out he said:

'They are not really men of colour, those performers; they only pretend to be. Not the real thing, you know, Mr. Baywick.' And after Clayton had gone to bed, Uncle Onesimus talked with me for some time about the negro race.

'There is a coloured University in the States,' he said. 'And they have some mighty smart students—B.A.'s, you know, some of them.'

And he looked at me a little doubtfully. Then he mentioned the name of Douglass, and of some other dusky notability whom I forget.

The other incident, which made a still deeper impression on me, took place in the Albert Hall. One day we had casually dropped in there for a few minutes to have a look at the huge empty building, and Uncle Onesimus began giving us some details of the great organ. He had all the figures at his fingers' ends, how many rows of pipes, how much weight of metal, and so on.

Clayton's young imagination was fired with 'the sense of the colossal, and he cried out: 'Oh, I say, I should like to hear some one play it with all his might.'

I don't know how Uncle Onesimus managed it, but when he, on some pretext, took us back to the Hall two days later there was some one in the organ-loft looking out for us, and in a moment or two the mighty instrument was in full operation. From what I can remember of the first piece, I think it must have been the overture to 'Der Freischütz;' I know I liked it very much, and so did Clayton. Afterwards came some march, and then—I presume out of compliment to Uncle Onesimus—the organist gave a sort of fantasia of American melodies. Perhaps these proved a trivial theme for so potent an instrument, but the effect on Uncle Onesimus was very striking. He followed the music silently, and seemed to forget us entirely. By-and-by there came a plaintive

melody, and, looking at Uncle Onesimus, I saw the tears were rolling down his cheeks. Half to himself, half to us, he sang :

'Way down upon the Swanee river,
Far, far away ;
There's where my heart is turning ever,
There's where the old folks stay.
All the world is sad and dreary,
Everywhere I roam ;
Oh, darkeys, how my heart grows weary,
Far from the old folks at home.

After a while the music took a martial tone. Uncle Onesimus sprang to his feet and paced up and down in growing excitement, beating time vehemently with his gold-headed cane while the organ pealed forth thunderous chords. He was like a man transfigured, and we gazed at him for a few seconds in astonishment till he burst into speech :

'Dey was poor slaves—poor black slaves, crushed beneath the cruel masters, and no one helped them. But at last the time came—the fulness of times, and the angel of the Lord blew his trumpet, and dey was free! De poor slaves was free! Listen to it! “Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching!” Can't yo' see them, see their blue coats! Can't yo' just hear the tread of their feet? Can't yo' see the waving of the flags? It is the army of freedom—the army of the Lord's deliverance! Listen again :

John Brown's body lies mouldering in the grave,
But his soul is marching on.'

The organ ceased and the old man sank down in a chair and covered his face with his hands. Soon the majesty of the Hallelujah Chorus was quivering through the air, but he sat still, silent, bent forward with covered face, and it was not till we were some distance from the building that he recovered his usual cheerful and benign demeanour. This was, I think, the only time when I could catch more than the faintest signs of the negro in his manner of speaking. Ordinarily he had a pretty strong American accent, but he had somehow conquered the difficulties which the African has in speaking the white man's tongue. That evening Uncle Onesimus talked to me a great deal of the great war. I heard the names of Chattanooga and Chancellorsville and the crowning victory of Gettysburg.

'Harry's father was through a good deal of it,' he said. 'It was queer the way he came to go out. He was in his club one day, just when the war broke out, along with a lot more officers ;

they were all saying then that the South was sure to win, that the South were gentlemen and the North all shopkeepers, and he stood up for the North. But he couldn't talk, he never could—he was always very quiet was Harry's father; but he just went home and sold out of the army, and went over to America. He was wounded quite early in the war, and he never quite got over it. But he was the best man that ever lived, was Harry's father; I knew him out there.'

When that pleasant holiday was over, I didn't see much of Clayton for a long time. I went to Oxford and he remained at school, and we only met occasionally. But when I said farewell to Oxford and began eating my dinners at the Middle Temple, I found that Uncle Onesimus had left New York and installed himself in London. Paragraphs about his movements came up now and then in the papers, and a biographical notice with a half-page portrait appeared in one of the religious weeklies. It seemed he had been a slave, but had escaped to Canada. During the war he offered himself as a volunteer. His services were apparently not accepted, and he fitted out at his own expense a kind of ambulance waggon and followed first Halleck and then Grant. When the war was over he established himself in the state of Delaware and took to market gardening. Tomatoes laid the first foundation of his fortune, and lucky speculation in building lots made him almost a millionaire.

The journalistic interest in Uncle Onesimus was due to his having been got at by philanthropic societies. His name began to figure heavily in subscription lists, and he appeared on platforms. I remember seeing him at Exeter Hall wedged in between an evangelical peer and a colonial bishop.

When I called on him in the flat he had taken and elaborately furnished, I found a library table covered with Reports of Annual Meetings and lists of subscribers to all sorts of constitutions and societies.

It was about Clayton, however, that the old man wanted to talk. He affected to speak a little doubtfully of him at first, and wanted my opinion of his character.

'He's very quick and intelligent,' I said. 'He has plenty of ability. He can do almost anything if he gives his mind to it. And then everybody likes him. I don't think there was any boy in the school more popular than he was.'

I spoke warmly of my young friend, and Uncle Onesimus beamed with delight and opened his whole heart to me.

'Mark my words,' he said, 'that boy'll be a great man some day, and you'll live to see it, if I don't.'

He unlocked a drawer and showed me its contents. There were all Clayton's letters, beginning with the first. He chuckled over some of its childish phrases—repeated references to a box of figs amused him immensely. Then he paraded before me all the boy's school-reports, pointing with triumphant finger to the 'Good' and the 'V. Good,' which indicated satisfaction with Clayton's progress in classics.

'Why, he can read Greek just as easy as the newspaper,' the old man said radiantly. 'There's nothing that boy can't do if he gives his mind to it.'

Clayton was at this time at Cambridge. He had won a small open scholarship at entrance, and the old man referred to this enthusiastically.

'He beat them all!' he said, rubbing his hands with delight. 'There were seven competitors, but he beat them all! Ah, you and I know what he is, don't we, Mr. Baywick?'

When I met Clayton next—it was at the beginning of the Long—I saw that he had developed into something of a dandy—or rather into that interesting class of adolescent which combines the qualities of the dandy and the prig. He passed a good many supercilious judgments on matters artistic and literary, but had also some strong admirations and was very decided in both sets of views. And after a good deal of such talk he found an opportunity to wonder that I was so careless about the fit of my clothes. He offered to recommend me to Poole, and named with deep respect a famous hatter and a fashionable maker of shirts. The conversation shifted round to Uncle Onesimus, and Clayton spoke warmly of the old man.

'He's very good to me,' he said, 'pays my bills every now and then out of his own pocket, you know, when I overstep my allowance.'

The last word stirred my curiosity.

'Well,' Clayton responded, 'I don't exactly know how I stand financially. Uncle Onesimus is my guardian, it seems. My father left him sole executor. I suppose we shall have a clearing up of accounts some time.'

During the rest of Clayton's residence at Cambridge I heard a good deal about him from Uncle Onesimus. The old man would sometimes come round to my chambers to give me some news of

his favourite, or to show me a letter he had received. These letters were the delight of his heart. He pointed out references to some of Clayton's distinguished friends, Lord Rippington and the eldest son of a famous painter.

'He mixes with the best,' the old man said triumphantly.

His pride in his young friend swelled beyond bounds when a number of the 'Granta' contained some lines of verse which Clayton had produced. Twelve lines of passable poetry, but Uncle Onesimus saw in them the promise of a new star in the firmament.

'Very likely it'll be poetry he'll take to,' he said, 'very likely, though when he goes about so much with Lord Rippington I think it'll be politics, and then perhaps knowing Sir Everard and being such a friend to his son will make him turn to painting. But he shall choose just what he likes, and he sha'n't be hampered by want of money at the start.'

I hadn't such a high opinion as Uncle Onesimus had of Clayton's performance in the 'Granta'—perhaps because I thought I could have made better verses myself—but I managed to praise them pretty liberally and without any evident insincerity. This encouraged Uncle Onesimus to open his heart still further, and he took from his pocket-book a sheet of note-paper. It contained some verses written by Clayton many years before when he was first at school to commemorate a birthday of the old man. They formed an acrostic on the name 'Onesimus' and were very fair verses for a boy of twelve. Uncle Onesimus gazed at them fondly.

'If he takes to poetry,' he said, 'and becomes a great poet, people will be glad enough to see the first verses he ever wrote. And they'll wonder who "Onesimus" was. The name isn't common.'

Some time after this, calling on Uncle Onesimus I found him hard at work on all the red library of Baedeker with a big map of Europe spread out before him.

'I am making out a plan for a tour,' he said. 'Harry and I are going to spend about a year travelling, and we mean to see a great deal. You know,' he went on more slowly, 'I haven't seen so much of the boy lately. It wouldn't do for me to go down to Cambridge. I should interrupt his studies, and then there are the reading parties in the summer. But we've fixed it up between us that by-and-by when he leaves Cambridge we're to have a long holiday together, and I'm going to show him Europe.'

This was more than a year beforehand, but the old man began to devote a great deal of time to looking up routes and studying all the *Merkwürdigkeiten* of foreign cities. He spoke on the subject to me now and then, as the skeleton plan got made out and the outline began to be filled in.

'It's not easy,' he said once, 'to make everything fit in just right. Perhaps we shall be nearer two years than one, as we shall want to see everything.'

Clayton alluded to the tour himself on a chance visit he paid me.

'I think it won't be bad,' he said. 'You know,' he added, 'some men wouldn't like trotting round with a negro. But I'm quite above these prejudices. Only where other people are concerned, you know, one has to be a bit careful. It wouldn't have done to have had him at our reading parties. He wouldn't have been comfortable.'

'Are you quite comfortable?' I quoted, recalling our first holiday with Uncle Onesimus.

Clayton laughed at the reminiscence.

'We did enjoy ourselves then,' he said; 'at least I did. The old man has been very good to me all along. But do you know I can't get any proper accounts out of him. He always puts me off. And what makes it rather queer is that I haven't a single relation in the world that I know. My father quarrelled with his family, or they did with him, and so I've never seen any of them.'

We fell to talking of the examinations, then not far off, and Clayton confessed that he hadn't worked very hard at Cambridge and that the reading parties hadn't amounted to much.

'They were too jolly to do much work in, you know,' he said. 'I must try and get a first somehow,' he added, 'or Uncle Onesimus will be disappointed. I think he expects to see me somewhere near the top of the list.'

Clayton's tone was very confident, but when the classical tripes list was published, he was in the second class and not too near the top. Uncle Onesimus, however, did not show any signs of disappointment. Perhaps he was consoled by a speech which his favourite had made at a recent debate in the Union, and which was something of a success.

'Perhaps it'll be politics after all,' the old man said; 'especially as he and Lord Rippingdon are such friends. I think Lord Rippingdon wants to come with us on our tour. I don't think

Harry exactly knows how to refuse him, though he says he'll put him off if he can.'

I inquired when they would leave England.

'Pretty soon,' the old man said, 'but we'll see you again. We shall have a set-off dinner, a farewell dinner, you know, and you shall come and no one else.'

A month or two passed, and I got no invitation from Uncle Onesimus. I supposed he had forgotten me, and was quite surprised to get a call from him towards the end of September.

'Why, Uncle Onesimus!' I said, 'I thought you were abroad. According to the plan you ought to be just getting to the Italian Lakes.'

The old man shook his head and smiled rather feebly.

'No,' he said, 'I didn't go. The young people will get on better without me. They don't want an old black nigger round with them everywhere.'

His disappointment, though he tried to hide it, was evident in his tones. I essayed some clumsy consolation.

'Perhaps,' I said, 'Clayton thought you mightn't like Lord Rippington; you don't know him very well, and——'

'Well,' he said, 'perhaps that's so. I don't believe but what Harry himself would have been pleased to have me along. . . . Why,' he broke off suddenly, 'there isn't a place I couldn't have told him something about!'

By-and-by I learned the real object of the old man's visit. Clayton had written only twice, and more than a fortnight had elapsed since the receipt of the last letter.

'I am afraid something may have happened to the boy,' he said, 'and perhaps he don't like to write, or perhaps he can't.'

After a little more circumlocution, he brought out his proposal, which was that I should take a trip abroad at his expense, and see if I could send any news of the two.

'Of course,' the old man said, 'you wouldn't say anything about me. You'll meet them quite by accident. Just as if you were making a trip and were quite surprised to see them. But they'll tell you what they've been doing and where they're going to next.'

I made some demur about accepting this offer, but the old man's eagerness and the remembrance of a picture I had once seen of the lower end of Lago Maggiore soon removed my scruples.

Uncle Onesimus took out of his pocket a portly roll of bank-notes, and mentioned the 11 A.M. train from Holborn Viaduct.

'You can get a sleeping-car through to Bâle,' he said.

I agreed to this too, and said I would start packing at once, whereat Uncle Onesimus wrung my hand and turned to go. He stopped at the door, however, and told me that as soon as I wanted more money I was to let him know. I had counted the notes and said that I was sure I should bring half of them back again, but the old man still hesitated, with his hand on the knob of the door. At last he said :

'There's just one thing more, Mr. Baywick. Harry's always been a good boy. He's never been wild, as far as I know. But you know young men will be young men, and maybe he'll get mixed up in some foolishness. I don't want to hear anything of it, only just to know that he is in no trouble—that's all.'

I found Clayton and his friend at Stresa. They complained of the heat, and spent a great part of their time in playing billiards. They intended to see Venice and perhaps Florence, but as soon as the hunting season commenced they were going back to England. Clayton had promised to stay for a few weeks at Conover Towers, the country seat of the Earl of Leominster, Lord Rippington's father.

I took this news back to Uncle Onesimus, who seemed not at all displeased.

'It'll be politics,' he said ; 'you'll see !'

For Lord Leominster had once had a seat in the Cabinet.

He pressed me for details of what we had done during the few days I had stayed with the two, and pointed out triumphantly how we had missed seeing things which we ought to have seen. I told him that once, when we were boating on Lake Como, Clayton had leaned over to me and said, in a low voice, 'Uncle Onesimus would enjoy this.'

This delighted him immensely.

'The boy doesn't forget me,' he said. 'We'll take our trip together still, only we'll do it in sections.'

I saw Clayton on his return to England. He was in most boisterous spirits at the prospect of hunting with the East Sandshire hounds. Uncle Onesimus had bought him a splendid hunter, so that he wouldn't be altogether dependent on the Conover stables.

About Christmas I saw him again, considerably changed. His

cheerfulness was gone, and his youthful cynicism; he was moody and fitful, spoke little, and sighed a great deal.

I soon found out the reason of the transformation. He was in love. When once this great confession was made, he could talk of nothing but of Lady Blanche, who was Lord Rippington's sister. She was so clever and brilliant, and so very, very beautiful. They had read poetry together, and criticised contemporary fiction. They had ridden together. Lady Blanche followed the hounds sometimes, and there was one day when they both got thrown out and had a long ride home side by side. They had danced together, and there was an evening when they had sat out together, though Lady Blanche's card was full and two promised partners were dreadfully disappointed. Lord Rippington didn't think half enough of his sister, which was perhaps to be accounted for by the principle of primogeniture and the law of entail.

Clayton's variations on the theme of Lady Blanche were all *allegro*, but the thought of Lord Leominster sent a terribly jarring note athwart the heavenly harmonies. Clayton admitted that he was a little afraid of the Earl, but he meant to screw up his courage, and he named a day when the Earl would be in town.

Some days after that important date he called at my chambers in the most absolute dejection.

'It's all up with me,' he said, after he had wrung my hand fervently. 'I'm the most miserable man in existence. And I've been an awful fool all along—simply an awful fool.'

He groaned and shook his head, looking the picture of abject misery.

'Do you know,' he said at last sharply, 'that I'm a beggar—an absolute beggar? And I always thought my father left me well off. But it seems that when he died there was just about 50*l.* left after paying his debts. It's Uncle Onesimus who has done everything for me all along. He sent me to school and to Cambridge, and he's given me everything. I've been just a pauper living on charity, though I never knew it; and a miserable beggar like me goes and proposes for the hand of Lady Blanche Pembridge!'

'Ah!' I said, 'you've spoken to Lord Leominster?'

'Yes,' he said, 'that's how it all came out. And I find that I am "entirely dependent on the caprice of an old man"—that's the way Lord Leominster puts it. And I'm not to go to the house any more, not to see her again, not to write to her.'

He relapsed into absolute incoherence, and then into silence. I murmured sympathy.

'Uncle Onesimus has treated me very badly,' he broke out again, 'in keeping this all in the background. I know he's been very good to me, but it's all ended in making me the most wretched man alive. If I had known I was poor I might have done something by now!'

He passed an hour in this way, alternately sighing and raving. At one moment he declared that life was over so far as he was concerned, that there was nothing now worth living for; in the next he talked of building up a sudden fortune in some way that he would find out by-and-by.

'How much do they give the editor of the *Times*?' he asked once, and I could hardly help smiling at the evident connection of ideas.

He was in the midst of another outburst against gods and men when Uncle Onesimus knocked at the door. Clayton turned away from him and pretended to bury himself in a book. But the old man was not offended by his fit of sulkiness and sat down by his side.

'Harry,' he said, 'you've kept away from Uncle Onesimus these last few days, and perhaps you're angry with him. That isn't right, Harry. Didn't you think that perhaps the old man who'd known you so long and looked after you ever since that night he saw you asleep in your little bed—didn't you think that perhaps he'd see you through this trouble? Perhaps you didn't know how much he could do.'

Clayton turned a searching gaze on Uncle Onesimus.

'Why, Harry,' the old man went on, 'you've been keeping away from good news. It's all fixed up now as right as anything. Uncle Onesimus has seen the great lord and had a long talk—a very long talk. And then he saw him again and some lawyers too—some lawyers, Harry, and now it's all fixed up right. If there's some one you want to see badly, you can go round to her house to-morrow and her papa will be pleased to see you again, and perhaps she'll be pleased as well.'

Clayton's sudden joy was as vehement as his depression had been. He seized both the old man's hands and vowed everlasting gratitude. The thought that perhaps a letter from Lady Blanche might be waiting at his rooms took him off in a great hurry. Uncle Onesimus lingered for a moment or two.

'These fine lords you have over here know how to drive a hard bargain,' he said, which set me wondering.

I caught a glimpse of Clayton a week or two later and got him to come round to my chambers, where he stopped till the small hours. He tried hard not to talk of Lady Blanche, but without much success. I learned that Uncle Onesimus's deed of gift was complete, and was told the figures of Clayton's income, and how much had been settled on his wife. The sum was considerable.

'I didn't think Uncle Onesimus was rich enough to spare so much,' Clayton said. 'Isn't it awfully good of him? Dear old Uncle Onesimus!'

The happy lovers were married at the close of the London season. The wedding was like most other fashionable weddings, and was reported fully in the ladies' papers, where justice was done to everything—from the bride's dress, a miracle of art, to the brooches, the 'gift of the bridegroom,' which helped to adorn the bridesmaids.

The 'breakfast' was spread at Lord Leominster's, and was a highly imposing function. Lady Blanche looked very pretty in her wedding dress, and wearing in her hair a tiara of diamonds, which was the present of Uncle Onesimus. The old man beamed benevolence on the happy pair. Lord Leominster proposed his health before we separated, and made quite a speech in his best parliamentary style, while the subject of his praises looked grave. The toast was drunk with enthusiasm, and then Clayton proposed three cheers for Uncle Onesimus. We cheered and lifted our glasses again, and the bride smiled her sweetest and clapped her little hands vigorously, and the old man had his brief moment of triumph and happiness.

When the bride rose to change her dress, the bishop who had conducted the ceremony tried to interest Uncle Onesimus in some new benevolent scheme. But no cheque was forthcoming, and the bishop was a little disappointed.

'I hope you're not giving up philanthropy, Mr. Potts,' he said in a half-jocular tone. Uncle Onesimus bowed only.

When the happy pair had driven off, Uncle Onesimus and I walked away together. He had become very low-spirited.

'Harry and I'll never take our trip together now,' he said, 'never!'

A little later he added:

'Seems to me that I shall be a bit lonesome without the boy.'

Perhaps I'll look in and see you sometimes in the evening, Mr. Baywick.'

But I was leaving England, and I told Uncle Onesimus so.

I was away from my native land for nearly three years. During that time events which I need not mention here had brought my name into the newspapers, and on my return to London I found myself a society lion. Lady Blanche Clayton was naturally one of the first to utilise me in that capacity, and my presence helped on more than one occasion to fill the drawing-rooms in Park Lane which she presided over. Besides these great occasions I dined with the Claytons as often as my other engagements would permit, and talked over our schoolboy days with my host. One day I inquired after Uncle Onesimus, and Lady Blanche informed me that she believed he had gone back to America.

'I expect our variable climate didn't suit him,' she said.

Clayton looked a little confused as this statement was made, and when we were alone he came back to the subject.

'It may seem rather strange,' he said, 'but I don't really know what has become of the dear old man. The fact is, Lady Blanche didn't take kindly to him and didn't like his calling here. And I am afraid that he got a "not at home" once or twice. And the last time he had seen me go in not long before him—we had passed him in fact driving—and he felt very much hurt. He went down the steps crying, it seems. I heard about it afterwards. It was an awful shame, you know, and I would have liked to call on him, but I didn't know exactly where he lived, and then one's time is so dreadfully filled up. But I've felt very bad about it several times since.'

I felt a little uneasy about the old man, and all the more when I heard that the furniture of his flat had been sold by auction directly after the wedding. I made some inquiries, but could learn nothing. Uncle Onesimus had disappeared and left no trace. I told Clayton what I had done and the negative result one day when five o'clock had taken me to taste Lady Blanche's tea.

'Oh, he's gone to America,' that lady said confidently, 'and he's much better there, poor dear man.'

Just then a letter was brought in for Clayton, who read it and seemed disturbed.

'It is from Uncle Onesimus,' he said. 'And he's ill, very ill, I am afraid. He wants me. I must go and see him.'

'Remember you have to take me out to dinner,' Lady Blanche said.

The address from which Uncle Onesimus had sent his one line of summons was Denmark Street, Finsbury Park. Appealed to by Lady Blanche, I had to say that Clayton's going might endanger the dinner.

'It is nearly six,' I remarked, 'and Finsbury Park is a long way off. And if Uncle Onesimus were really very ill you might not like to come away at once.'

'Just so,' said Lady Blanche; 'it's quite clear you can't go now.'

I relieved Clayton's scruples by offering to go myself, and to let him know if the old man's illness was at all serious.

'But how does he come to be living at Finsbury Park?' Clayton asked. To which neither Lady Blanche nor I replied, though I think we both guessed why.

At any rate I was not very much surprised to find that Denmark Street was a very poor sort of thoroughfare, and that the room in which Uncle Onesimus was lying was very poorly and scantily furnished. But I was surprised and immeasurably saddened to see how very ill the old man was. The doctor happened to be making his call, but I didn't need his authority to tell me that my poor old friend had only a few hours to live. He was then asleep, and a professional nurse sat at the bedside.

'She's only just come,' the doctor explained. 'I got her on my own responsibility. But he has some wealthy friends, it seems—he wrote to somebody in Park Lane, I suppose he's a sort of *protégé* of theirs. I suppose I did right?' he said interrogatively.

'Quite right,' I said, and as he was leaving I asked him to forward a telegram to Clayton. I took my seat at the head of the bed opposite the nurse and sat there waiting till the old man should wake. This happened in about an hour, and at first he took me for Clayton.

'Harry, dear boy,' he said.

I told him that Clayton would soon come, very soon. He nodded feebly.

'Yes, he'll come,' he said. 'Harry'll come. I haven't seen him for so long, and the door was shut in my face. But it wasn't Harry's fault.'

He closed his eyes wearily, and soon it was clear his mind was wandering. He was back in the scenes of his youth, babbling of scattered reminiscences to which I had no key.

Now and then he murmured scraps of song. One of them I had heard before—

All the world is sad and dreary,
Everywhere I roam;
Oh, darkeys, how my heart grows weary,
Far from the old folks at home.

Waking about midnight, he saw that Clayton had taken my place. His face lighted up at sight of his 'dear boy,' but he seemed too weak to speak. After some time he said in his old manner, 'Are you pretty comfortable, Harry?'

Perhaps his mind had gone back to the past. He said nothing more, and his eyes soon closed again. Clayton's gaze wandered round the room and turned from the cheap furniture and dingy curtains to look inquiringly at me.

After a while he bent over to me and whispered:

'Was he really poor, do you think? Did he give me everything?'

I nodded gravely, and he turned to the nurse.

'He is sure to get better, isn't he?' he breathed hoarsely. The nurse shook her head.

'He's an old man,' she said in low tones, 'and he hasn't been looked after properly; he'll hardly live through the night.'

Our light whispering was enough to disturb the sleeper. He opened his eyes and fixed them intently on Clayton.

'Harry,' he said faintly, 'be a good man, like your father. . . . Uncle Onesimus can't help you any more, and he won't see. . . .'

The effort of speaking was too great; he relapsed into sleep, and for more than two hours we sat still listening to the feeble breathing which showed that the old man was still alive.

Suddenly he moved and half sat up in the bed with his eyes wide open.

'I can hear the drums!' he cried out. 'Dey's coming dis way! Listen!

John Brown's body lies mouldering in the grave,
But his soul is marching on.

Dey's going forth to de fight, de grand army, de army ob de Lord's deliverance!'

And he fell back and lay very still and quiet.

Clayton bent over the pillow.

'Uncle Onesimus,' he cried out, 'you must get better and you must come and live with us always. As soon as ever you can move you must come!'

But Uncle Onesimus was past all hearing.

The old man had a funeral which astonished Denmark Street, Finsbury Park. And notices of his death appeared in the religious papers and put Societies and Associations in a state of expectancy. But they got no legacies. After the funeral a full-length portrait of the old man which had been relegated to some obscure corner in the house in Park Lane was brought down and given a position of honour in the drawing-room, where I fancy it often puzzled the curious. And once—it was about a year after the old man's death—I heard Lady Blanche directly questioned on the subject. Her answer was ready.

'That,' she said blandly, 'is the portrait of a negro whom Harry's father met in America. He was very fond of Harry, and Harry always called him Uncle Onesimus.'

'A faithful servant of the family,' the fair querist continued, scanning the portrait; 'the affectionate dependant, I understand?'

'Exactly,' Lady Blanche replied, and met my glance without wincing.

Her husband noticed that I overheard what had been said, and he alluded to it when we were alone.

'Lady Blanche's version of the story is rather a shame,' he said, 'but she's very sensitive about—about where our money came from, you know. And after all it makes no difference to dear old Uncle Onesimus now.'

'No,' I said, 'I suppose it makes no difference to Uncle Onesimus now.'

CASTLES IN THE AIR.

ONE of the curiosities of the New World, and one of its most perplexing curiosities, is the rock dwellings on the cañons of Colorado. Here in the face of limestone precipices are whole ranges of habitations at a great height, only to be reached by means of ladders or ropes from above.

No one knows when these singular dwellings were occupied, nor by whom.

We have become familiarised with those puzzling troglodyte habitations through illustrated papers in magazines, and through books published in America and circulating in England.

It has not occurred to any that within twenty-four hours or London are to be found precisely identical phenomena, just as curious and just as mysterious.

The entire region of the lower chalk in the ancient Périgord, and that of the Jura limestone in the old province of Quercy, and the sandstone of Lower Limousin are honeycombed with an incredible number of mysterious, unexplored, and to some extent inexplicable, remains of rock dwellers. The limestone crags on the banks of the Lot and the Dordogne, the chalk cliffs on the Vézère, rise to great heights—three hundred to five hundred feet—and whenever a softer bed has intervened between hard strata, there the rain and frost have scooped out much material, leaving ledges with overhanging roofs.

These have been occupied from a vastly remote period, even from the Glacial epoch, but we are not now going to speak of the natural caves and shelters, but of such as have been cut out by man, with windows and doors, with wells, silos, stables, bed-chambers, kitchens, banqueting-halls and guard-rooms.

The visitor whirls along the valley of the Lot or Vézère in the train, and notices natural caves and holes in the precipices which he assumes to be natural. But if he is walking, and pauses to examine the faces of the cliffs, he very soon becomes aware that the precipices at some time or another, especially such as face the sun, were alive with human occupants. He discerns square-cut windows, and if he has an opera-glass can discern within them the notches for bars whereby these windows were closed. High up in

a sheer cliff he will see a hole with a pole athwart it, which has undoubtedly been there placed for hauling provisions up to such as were hid in this cave.

To reach these dwellings is no easy matter. They are accessible only by rope from above or by ladder from below. Indeed, in many cases two or more ladders must be tied together, or, better still, a peculiarly tall poplar tree be cut down and set against the face of the rock, and the door to these habitations is reached by a scramble up the poplar. But in other cases notches may be discerned, cut in the face of the rock, to receive the fingers and toes, precisely as in Colorado. These, however, are so worn by the weather that they can hardly be used at present, unless deepened with a pickaxe. To a cliff-dwelling called Cazelles, on the road from Tayac to Sarlat, this was the method of ascent. As boys frequently attempted the scramble, their fathers have cut away the notches, lest accidents should happen, and now the series of chambers can be reached only by a ladder.

When by some means or other the terrace has been reached where these habitations are, then it is found that the rock has been burrowed into so as to form a series of chambers, that received light from windows cut in the thin face of rock which was allowed to remain. Or else where the friable bed had been hollowed out to a considerable depth—sometimes as much as forty feet—by atmospheric influence, walls have been run up to divide the space into chambers, separated by doors, and the face has been closed as well by walls with windows in them. The walls have in many cases, if not most, been broken down, but the foundations remain, and in the rock may still be seen the holes in which the door hinged and turned. Store chambers have been excavated, and the marks of the tools on the rock are everywhere discernible. These store chambers were frequently closed by wooden divisions, and the grooves for the planks and the sockets for the sustaining beams remain.

In the sandstone habitations very generally the faces of the caves were not walled but boarded. There can be no doubt about this, the traces are distinct.

The bedrooms can be always made out, as the beds were cut in the rock, and much resemble the *arcosolia* in the Roman Catacombs. Where the bed was high above the floor, a notch was cut in the rock for the foot to rest in, to assist in the ascent into the place of repose. There were cupboards of all sizes in the rock

chambers, and grooves remain for the shelves and also for the doors which closed them.

One interesting feature, moreover, in these rock habitations is the elaborate pains taken to keep them dry. The rock itself, being of hard chalk or limestone, is dry enough, but after cold weather, when there comes up a warm west wind from the Atlantic, a film of moisture forms on the rock, and trickles down or drops. This was very unpleasant to the dwellers in the caves, therefore they grooved their walls and cut channels over them at an incline leading to receptacles for the condensed water, scooped out of the living rock. A notch allowed these when brimming to overflow into a little channel cut in the floor, which conveyed the tiny rill to the edge of the precipice. In many places, where every other trace of human occupation has disappeared, these precautions against wet remain to attest that the cave shelters were once tenanted by human beings.

The feasting rooms can also quite well be made out by the benches cut in the rock at a suitable level for seats. The fireplace is less easily ascertained, as the fire destroyed the rock wherever it reached it. Nevertheless some fireplaces with chimneys remain, and in others the discolouration and decomposition of the rock shows where the fires have been. The ovens are usually constructed of wall stones, and in many cases remain in a ruinous condition.

In more than one instance a well has been bored in the rock to a great depth, so that those living in the cliff colony were independent of the springs at the feet of the precipices. In such cases the holes in which the windlass worked for drawing up the water can almost always be made out.

In one of these rock habitations, called *La Roque de Tayac*, that overhangs the *Vézère*, a path cut in the cliff leads to a chasm, purposely made, in face of a yawning cavern. Marks in the rock show that a drawbridge formerly crossed this gap, deliberately cut in face of the cave, to a ledge beyond, by means of which the grotto is entered. When entered it is found to be a great stable for horses or cows. There are nineteen stalls cut in the rock with mangers, and even the holes remain through which were passed the halters that attached the beasts. In the floor of this stable is a well, and immediately above the well the rock is cut through to an upper storey. Through a second opening in the roof of this cave stable, by means of a ladder this upper storey is reached,

when it is found to have been that in which the men lived whose cattle were in the dwelling below. They could draw water for the beasts in the stable or for themselves through the hole cut in the stable roof.

A natural ledge extends from this range of dwellings for some distance along the face of the cliff. It is so narrow that it can only be walked along by one who has a steady head. After continuing some distance, it is seen that the rock has been cut away for a space of fifteen feet, beyond which the ledge continues again. This was done to prevent an enemy approaching by this shelf. For the convenience of those occupying the rock the ledge was artificially widened by a wooden floor being placed over it; the marks of the beams let into the rock remain, as well as the indications of the supports on the narrow edge of the terrace. This ledge or terrace has not a perpendicular face, but overhangs about forty feet.

The little river Beune, that flows into the Vézère at Les Eyzies, is so charged with lime that it encrusts the roots of the water plants that occupy its marshy bed, and gradually kills them. Thereupon a fresh layer of vegetable growth forms above the petrified bed. This has now been arrested by deep drains, but it continued as a regular process from year to year till recently. The whole river valley from source to mouth is, and was still more so, a vast morass, swarming with mosquitoes. The valley is inclosed within precipitous cliffs, and the plateau on both sides is forest land. No road led up the valley till within four years, and the valley was almost inaccessible. Now it has been opened out, and reveals itself to have swarmed at one time with inhabitants who scooped out houses for themselves in the cliffs on both sides. Those who lived there were safe as they could be nowhere else. If assailed from the plateaux above, they could escape over the morass, and defy their enemies from the rock fastnesses on the other side of the marsh, across which they alone could thread their way. Here may be found the stables and the remains of solitary habitations and of whole communities, in great numbers.

A mediæval castle occupies a promontory between the Beune and a little tributary rill.

The rock on which the thirteenth-century towers rise is honey-combed with dwellings. A very extensive group under it consisted of stables and bed-chambers and hall on one level, reached only by a door bored through a projecting buttress of rock, and

then still further protected by the ledge being cut away and crossed by a fall bridge. Here also, as at La Roque de Tayac, no one could traverse the bridge without being exposed to the weapons of those occupying the cave. Moreover a guard-room has been deliberately scooped out of the rock, for one sentinel to command the bridge, with access from the rock dwelling in the rear, and with windows by means of which he could thrust down any unwelcome visitor who ventured across.

It is interesting at this place, Commarque, to compare the stone of the ruined castle with the rock of the cave dwellings. The former looks as of yesterday. Moreover, in the side glen the face of the cliff is grooved and scooped out, and scabbled all over with the marks of men's hands making homes for themselves in the living rock, or against it; and here are the quarries whence was raised the stone of which the mediæval castle was built. In quarrying the building stone many of the earlier habitations seem to have been destroyed.

The ruins of Commarque have been purchased by the Belgian Prince de Croye, and he is now engaged in the restoration of the castle, and in making roads by which it can be reached through the forests and over the rocks. It is to be hoped that in the necessary excavations some evidence may be obtained which will give a clue to *who* it was who occupied these puzzling, mysterious habitations.

Till the prince brought workmen to the spot, the head streams of the Beune were an absolute solitude, where neither man nor beast was to be seen.

There is a further evidence of antiquity in the dwellings at Commarque. The bed of the valley has risen to such an extent, owing to the gradual upheaval of the bottom through petrification of the water plants and moss, that only the crown of the caves can be seen, and in some cases the beds are level with the bog plants. At least five feet, probably a great deal more, has been slowly built up by incrustation since these habitations were first excavated. It is hardly conceivable that this can have been done in three or four hundred years.

At the place called Les Eyzies, one very famous among prehistoric antiquaries for its deposits of the reindeer period, and of the men who hunted them and the mammoth, in the face of a cliff facing north is a range of overhanging ledges, high up, 270 feet above the level of the valley, and the cliff rises about 100 feet

above. This is locally called the Castle and Church of the Great Guillem. Children are still frightened by their nurses with the name of Le Gros Guillem, who is said to carry off and eat little children.

A steep scramble up short grass and rubble leads to this cliff, and here remains of a gateway in masonry give access to the rock, up which ascent is made by steps in this rock. This, however, is not for more than a dozen feet, and then a terrace is reached under several overhanging ledges of rock, forming conchoidal chambers, some of which have been separated from each other by masonry, and the whole of which was formerly faced up with walls that have now completely disappeared. An upper storey of chambers cut out in the rock is at present utterly inaccessible, and it is not easy to see how it ever was reached except by a balcony thrust from the walled-up face over the precipice, from which balcony a ladder planted on it would admit to the door above. The first of the shell-shaped chambers has in it five beds cut in the rock: this is called the Castle. The next has crosses cut in the floor: for what object is inconceivable. This, of course, is L'Eglise. A third chamber has in it a bench and stalls cut in the rock, and a well-like hole, perhaps natural, but trimmed round the edges leading down to water. Farther on is a tunnel entering the mountain in a winding course, with a vessel like a holy-water stoup at the entrance, cut out of the rock, which was probably a collecting hole for water condensed on the rock.

No records of this habitation or castle remain. It is absolutely unmentioned in mediæval history; and yet, almost certainly, it was inhabited during the Hundred Years' War.

On the banks of the Lot, below where the Célé enters it, the river is commanded by a huge buttress of the limestone plateau above, that stands forward and plunges its feet into the clear river. This rock is fissured on its upper face, but the rent does not extend through it. The opening, which is up-stream, is walled up and battlemented, with door and windows. Within is a huge wedge-shaped vault with side-chambers like guard-rooms, all natural. In the floors of these have been found the remains of the reindeer, cave lion, mammoth, and the tools of contemporary man, of flint and bone. But the walls are undoubtedly mediæval, and the name of the place is La Défilée des Anglais. The story goes that it was held by a band of Free Companions, sold to the English, and that they commanded all communication along the river from this

point. A road carried through a tunnel has been blasted athwart the rock beneath this castle in the air.

In the Célé valley above are numerous rock habitations more or less artificial, and mostly with their walls filling up the natural openings, and the natural caves artificially enlarged. A most singular castle in the air is that of Brengues. Here a terrace about 250 feet above the river was blocked at both ends by a mediæval gateway. One remains; the other has been destroyed. A miller wished to reconstruct his mill below in the valley, and the simplest way of getting stones was to destroy the gateway and roll down the hewn blocks.

Midway between these gates is the Château des Anglais suspended like a swallow's nest under the eaves of an overhanging cliff, which serves as roof to it. It is tolerably perfect, for the very good reason that no one can get at it to pull it to pieces. Ladders must be constructed against the rock, cramped to it, to enable anyone to mount to the door. It cannot be reached from above, as the rock overhangs too much for that.

On the same river, a little lower, is a much more extensive castle in the air, consisting of a series of caverns helped out with walls. This is believed to have been one of the last refuges of Duke Waifre of Aquitaine in the middle of the eighth century. Pepin hunted him from place to place. Dislodged from his rocky castle at Brengues, Waifre escaped into Périgord, and hid among the chalk lurking holes, where it was impossible for him to be caught. Pepin knew this, and he offered bribes to his servants. Corrupted by these, some of them assassinated him when he was asleep on the night of June 2, 768. Pepin despoiled the body of the gold bracelets adorned with pendant gems which the unfortunate duke had been accustomed to wear, and gave them to the Abbey of St. Denis, where they remained for centuries, and were called 'the pears of Waifre.' The body of the duke was transferred to Limoges, and his tomb is under the present cathedral, and is marked by a curious piece of carving and an inscription let into the wall of the crypt that contains it.

There can exist no doubt whatever that many of these rock habitations were converted into strongholds by the Free Companies that terrorised the country during the English domination; but it is singular how few of them are mentioned by the historians of the period by name as such.

There is one, still called the Castle of the English, which

occupies an impregnable position in the face of the cliff in the great *cirque* of Autoire, which was held by the freebooter Perducat d'Albret, who, however, served the English and the French alike, or rather he served himself first, and sold his sword alternately to the English and to the French. Nevertheless, the castles held by these French freebooters are all attributed to the English, as, indeed, is every mysterious and daring work of which the ruins remain through the country. Autoire is a superb limestone *cirque* facing north, and opening into the broad plain of the Dordogne. The cliffs rise 400 feet from the river bottom, and the river shoots over them into the lap of the great basin in a fall of which the Alps need not be ashamed. From the precipices all round issue streams that have travelled underground, and in frosty weather they steam as if they were boiling. As they rain down the white cliffs they nourish mighty beds of luxuriant maidenhair fern.

More than halfway up the side of this vast cauldron is the castle. It is built on a ledge only twelve feet wide, three of which are taken up by the castle wall. There is space only for a circular tower, and then for a cordon of chambers seventy feet long. Outside the round tower are the oven and remains of domestic buildings.

In the event of the garrison of this structural castle being hard pressed, two means of escape were reserved. By climbing like a cat up the face of the precipice with hands and toes, a narrow ledge hardly three feet wide is reached, which gives access to chambers scooped in the rock.

The other means of escape was by running along the ledge on which the castle is built, up the side of the cauldron to a point where formerly a tall tree grew out of the rock. Tradition says that the garrison were able to escape that way to the plateau above. They ran like squirrels up the tree, and leaped from a bough into an ivy bush that clung to the rock, and from which they were able to ascend to the barren plain above.

It was from this castle at Autoire that Villandrando made a sudden swoop upon Figeac in 1372, and plundered it of treasure to the amount of 50,000 gold francs, and would not give up the town to the French king before he was promised and paid 120,000 more francs.

Perducat d'Albret was in England on the occasion of Wat Tyler's rebellion, and he armed and stood by the king. Richard,

for his readiness, gave him the Castle of Caumont, where he died in 1382. Froissart has a good deal to say about him.

One very singular 'castle in the air' is that of La Roque Gageac on the Dordogne. It is built on a shelf in the face of an overhanging precipice, and was quite inaccessible till about three years ago, when it was reached by driving pegs into the face of the cliff, thus forming a precarious stair. The peg-holes remained, but the original series of wooden steps had long ago disappeared. This castle is in very tolerable preservation, partly because it could not be reached, and partly because, when accessible, if thrown down, its stones would have crashed into the roofs of the little town that clings to the roots of the precipice. The history of this stronghold is pretty well known. It belonged to the Bishop of Sarlat, and it never fell into the power of the English, who, however, held the rocky *bastide*, or free town, on a height on the opposite side of the river.

On the Vézère, opposite Le Moustier, is a huge sheer cliff, 2,000 feet long. A seam runs along it halfway up from end to end, and at the base it overhangs some thirty to forty feet. The whole of this upper seam, which forms a terrace overhung by the natural rock, has been inhabited, and presents a series of chambers. Not only so, but below as well, all the overhanging lower rock has been utilised for buildings. At some remote period huge masses of rock that leaned forward have fallen, and form a pile of rock ruin beyond the line to which the overhanging rock reaches at present. All this agglomeration of rock is cut about into staircases, basements for walls, windows, doorways, passages. Apparently at one time a town existed there, which has disappeared, and not a soul remains there now.

As it happens, we do know something of this place. We know that about 990 Froterius, Bishop of Périgueux, built a castle there to defend the valley from the incursions of the Normans. We know also that the place existed through the Middle Ages till the year 1401, when the English-minded captain, the Seigneur of Limeuil, took it by surprise on Passion Sunday from the Seigneur Ademar, who was of the French allegiance, and hanged every man found therein. Since that date it is never mentioned.

Now it so happened, when the writer visited the spot recently, that some masons had been turning over the soil under the over-leaning cliffs in quest of sand, and they had pitched on the kitchen midden of the inhabitants. They had disclosed vast

masses of bones and pottery, but all the pottery was of the beautiful black paste that is distinctive of the early iron age. Consequently this rock dwelling must have been occupied by the early Gauls, ages before the Bishop of Périgueux built his fortress. There can be no question, had the men gone a few feet deeper, they would have unearthed the remains of the bronze and polished stone age, and some feet below that again the flint and bone weapons of the first inhabitants of the soil, when glaciers covered the centre of France, and rolled down the Vézère as far as Brive.

Of the 'castles in the air' the peasants have a tradition. They relate that they were held by the English—*les brigands, mais c'étaient des Anglais, c'est la même chose*—and that they were reduced in this wise. The peasants collected brushwood, molten pitch and fat in casks on the summit of the rocks, and lighted the whole mass, which they rolled over upon the troglodyte habitations below.

Now had these brigands, the English, been content with dwelling in the holes of the rocks, this would not have injured them, but they had constructed galleries of wood to form means of communication from one set of chambers to another. They had also built out projecting apartments, and the molten flaming matter poured over and ignited these structures, which blazing, licked the cliff, and sent fiery tongues and volumes of smoke into the cave dwellings.

Wherever chalk is touched by fire it goes to pieces, and the faces of the chambers crumbled away. The occupants were smothered or burnt.

That this actually was the manner in which some of these strongholds were reduced cannot be doubted. The marks of fire are present still. Where the chalk has been burnt and it crumbles it assumes the look of brown sugar, and wherever this brown sugary appearance is present about the rock windows and doors of one of these castles in the air, we know the manner of its reduction.

In conclusion, the writer ventures on a guess in etymology. Rock dwellings in the old English Guyenne—it was English for three hundred years—are called *Rouffes*, and those who inhabited them *Rouffiens*. Is it not possible that our English word 'ruffian' may be a reminiscence of these freebooters who had their strongholds in the rock, when Guyenne was a province attached to the English crown?

CHARACTER NOTE.

THE SQUIRE.

Il n'y a pour l'homme qu'un vrai malheur, c'est d'avoir quelque chose à se reprocher.

HE is fine, fresh-coloured, upright, and over seventy years old. The old gaffers in the village remember him in his youth as the straightest rider in the county. 'Our Squire was a game un,' says one of them with a twinkle in his ancient eye. He is, for that matter, game still. He drives even now twenty miles to the Derby, in a sporting coat with a rose in his button-hole and a fine expectation of enjoyment on his brave old face. There is still about him a certain freshness, keenness, and vigour very pleasant to see. He is yet as good a judge of a horse as any man in the neighbourhood. He has organised and presides over the village cricket team, and is proud that his eleven should be the terror of other persons' elevens for miles round.

The Squire lives in a great stone house which has been in his family for many generations. His estate and his tenants are admirably looked after. He walks over his property with a fine elastic tread that is almost youthful, every day except Sundays. His people are a little afraid and infinitely fond of him. To his servants he is perfectly just, strict, and kind. There is not one of them who would dare to neglect his duty, nor one who is not certain of finding in his master a great justice and liberality.

His charity is as little abused, perhaps, as any man's. Even the people to whom he gives speak well of him. The little village girls, after a fine simple old custom, drop him the profoundest of courtesies. He knows nearly every one of them by name—has known by name their parents and grandparents before them. He walks regularly with his family, rather slowly and with a good deal of dignity, to church every Sunday morning. The gaffers, remembering his wild youth, wink at each other sometimes as he passes thus. But, indeed, even his wildness has been characterised by a blameless honour and generosity, and there is no man to-day who can remember against him anything unworthy of an upright and honest gentleman.

The Squire is sprucely dressed upon all occasions. On Sundays, particularly, he recalls to one's mind the dandyism of his youth.

He always has a flower in his coat, and his grey felt hat is perfectly trim and well brushed. Upon Sunday, too, he wears gloves, and has a fine solemn air with him, which of itself almost makes one feel Sabbatical.

He reads the lessons in church with perfect conviction and simplicity. 'He do do it beautiful!' says Granny, who is deaf and has not heard a word. But his reverent old face and fine devout air impress her perhaps, as they impress many other simple people. The Squire says his prayers in a sitting posture, with one hand hiding his face. One can distinguish his deep 'Amen' among the rustic responses. He does not turn to the east at the creed to gratify the prejudices of an enlightened youthful vicar. He is quite conservative and narrow-minded. His feelings are a great deal hurt and wounded when singing is introduced where saying has been the fashion ever since he can remember. His religion, indeed, is so perfectly simple and faithful and behind the times that it seems very little different from the childish religion he learnt—Heaven knows how many long years ago—at his mother's knee. Perhaps it is not different at all, and in this brave old heart the simple, tender little ideas of a simple little mother still live and bear fruit a hundredfold.

The Squire is, as he should be, the hottest of Tories. The little village constitutes an absurd little branch of the Primrose League. The Squire gives the Primrose League two suppers and a series of village entertainments every year to keep up its political energy. He addresses it with a great deal of vigorous simplicity, which suits it admirably. Perhaps his arguments are not very good. It is not an argument at all, very likely, to say that Mr. Gladstone is a double-dyed villain. But in this case the statement does as well or a great deal better than an argument. The first article in the village political creed is to believe what the Squire says. And indeed, in many things, the village might do worse.

After the politics the Squire's daughters, who are plain, kindly and middle-aged, play duets, the Vicar's wife sings one of her three little songs, and the Squire reads an extract out of Dickens. The Squire is not a literary man in a general way. He believes in the Bible and Sir Walter Scott, and sometimes in the mellow, lamp-lit evenings he takes his Byron and re-reads some of those wild love lyrics which in his youth, at a certain romantic time, he very likely knew by heart. He looks up from the book sometimes, with very kindly old eyes, at Madame sitting opposite to him.

Madame is still upright, and handsome in spite of grey hairs and wrinkles. The world finds her, indeed, a little too quiet and dignified for its liking.

And the Squire says, with a smile half tender and humorous, 'Do you remember this, Mary?' and reads her a line or two in some such voice as he reads the Song of Solomon in church.

And the faintest delicate colour starts in Madame's old cheeks, and there is a little tender droop about her lips, and she remembers it—very well indeed.

The Squire is quite devoted to Madame. Perhaps to him she is still bright-eyed and one-and-twenty. Or perhaps he thinks that seventy-two is the most charming and becoming age in the world. The old couple are still quite enterprising. Now the children are well advanced in middle life Madame feels she may safely leave them—for a few weeks, that is—to themselves. So every autumn the old pair take a trip abroad. The Squire's attitude towards Madame is quite chivalrous and protecting and considerate. The Squire studies Murray and Baedeker through his gold-rimmed spectacles, and tells Madame, who is horribly submissive and old-fashioned, where it will be best for them to go next. The Squire speaks languages in the perfectly precise and grammatical manner in which he learnt them in his youth, and which considerably astonishes the natives. Madame does a great deal of standing-by and following her husband. She was young when such an attitude was common to all women. She is not learned. She is not at all ambitious. She is quite loving and simple. She knows very well how to manage a house. She is very proud of her table linen and her china. She used to be fearfully and wonderfully learned with her babies. She is ever so little shy and chilling in her intercourse with strangers, and is devoted to her husband with all the depth and strength of her faithful heart.

The Squire is pre-eminently the master in his own house. To Madame he is master also, but a master how infinitely kind, loving, just, and tender only Madame knows. He reads Prayers—a solemn chapter out of the Bible and a long supplication compiled by a prosy old bishop—at eight o'clock every morning. Madame kneels by his side, with grey bent head, and devout, folded hands. After breakfast the Squire leaves her to her household duties and takes a ride. His costume is admirably correct and youthful. His fine fresh-coloured old face glows with the exercise.

He is still 'game' enough to occasionally drive four-in-hand. To be complimented as the best whip in the county causes his honest, dignified old face to redden pleasantly with pride. In the afternoons he watches the cricket or his daughters playing tennis. 'A fine game,' he says. 'A very fine game.' He thinks all games fine almost, and those in which horseflesh can be introduced the finest of all. He would play tennis himself only Madame is anxious about his heart, and when he handles a racquet comes into the garden with a face so appealing and distressed as to cause him to desist immediately.

But after all it is Madame herself who first goes the way of all flesh. She dies very quietly indeed. The Squire is by her bedside, and holds her feeble fingers to the last in his strong old hand.

'We have been very happy, my dear,' says the wife.

'Ay, ay, Mary. God has been very good,' answers the Squire in his simple fashion. The daughters, who have known the devotion which the old couple have borne to each other, are surprised at their father's steady courage and composure when the end comes.

'You must take comfort,' says the Vicar.

'I have taken it,' says the Squire. 'I am not far from eighty years old. I shall not be long without her.'

At the funeral in the little churchyard, surrounded by his children and by the poor people who have received a thousand tender charities from the dead woman, the Squire's fine old face stands out with a great courage and serenity against the wintry sky.

Afterwards, when he has reached home, he goes to the stable and gives some orders about Madame's pony. 'Don't work her any more,' he says to the groom. 'Let Nellie enjoy herself. Her mistress would have wished it.' And Nellie answers him with a neigh, and rubs her old nose against his black coat. When he gets back to his library, he writes in a firm old hand to beg that the village football match may not be postponed on account of 'my great loss.'

And for the first time the full extent of that loss comes upon him. In the short winter twilight his eldest daughter, who is a plain, homely little woman, with a great loving heart, finds him sitting, with bent head and dreary eyes, looking into a lifeless fire.

'Will you come to tea, father?' she says softly. 'We are waiting for you.'

'Presently, presently,' he answers in an old voice. Above him

is a picture of Madame at three-and-twenty years old, sweet, bright, and blushing.

He remembers her to-night just as she was then. He recalls the beautiful, rapt maternity upon her face as she bent over the first of their children. The child died a baby. It comforts the Squire's brave, simple old heart to think that the two are together to-night. He goes back in fancy, no doubt, as he sits in the darkening room beneath her picture, to a thousand trivial incidents of their quiet married life. They have been very happy. There have been troubles indeed, but they have shared them. There has been the poor old human need for forbearance. He thinks to-night that such a need made them care for each other not less, but more. If his memories are sad, as at such a time they must needs be, they are not bitter at all. He has been blessed, is still blessed, above other men. When he joins his daughters, a sad little party in the lamp-lit drawing-room, there is a courage and even a certain hope and cheerfulness upon his rugged face.

Such a courage and cheerfulness mark all his life afterward. He shoots pheasants in the autumn in the home coverts as he used to do, and appears to enjoy the sport as he has always enjoyed it. He takes the same interest in the horses and dogs and the farming. The estate is as carefully looked after as ever. 'But he thinks on her,' says Granny. 'He thinks on her all the time.' Granny is right, perhaps, though she has only the wisdom of the simple. The Squire is very particular that none of Madame's charities should be neglected. He himself audits the modest accounts of her Clothing Club. He desires that one of his daughters shall distribute, in her place, simple remedies for the poor old people's aches and pains. He likes still that the house shall be cheerful, and to see happy faces about him. He does not very often talk of the dead wife. It is his habit, instead, to do as she would wish. His children are startled sometimes to see how faithfully her smallest desires are remembered and obeyed. By a tacit consent her place by the Squire's side in church is always left vacant. But except this, his fashion of mourning her is almost wholly practical. He calls in sometimes in the afternoon to chat with a certain small farmer whom Madame, in her fine goodness and innocence, thought she was going to reclaim from habits of inebriation. He takes out her great retriever every day for a long walk, Madame having had a theory that Don's internal arrangements required an abnormal amount of exercise.

One of his daughters tells the story long after, smiling, and with tender tears in her eyes, how he even wears the warmest and scrubbiest of underclothing during the winter in accordance with one of the dead Madame's fond and anxious wishes.

There are a thousand ways in which the brave old man is faithful to her memory. With his simple faith in the Unseen, he fancies that she looks down from some happy Heaven, and is glad, as she would have been on earth, to see him well, active, and so far as may be, contented.

The villagers always follow his stalwart, solitary old figure with the comment that 'he do bear up wonderful.'

He is so to the end. To the end the brave old face has a cheery look for every man. To the end he is a fine, honest, sportsman-like, God-fearing country gentleman. To the end he has a mind fresh, keen, active, a great love for his dogs and his horses, a great generosity, a great manliness. To the end he has a heart full of kindly and noble thoughts—with one most faithful and abiding memory.

And in that Place whither his works shall follow him he joins Madame at last.

WITH EDGED TOOLS.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A LONG DEBT.

The life unlived, the deed undone, the tear
Unshed.

'I RATHER expect—Lady Cantourne,' said Sir John to his servants when he returned home, 'any time between now and ten o'clock.'

The butler, having a vivid recollection of an occasion when Lady Cantourne was shown into a drawing-room where there were no flowers, made his preparations accordingly. The flowers were set out with that masculine ignorance of such matters which brings a smile—not wholly of mirth—to a woman's face. The little-used drawing-room was brought under the notice of the housekeeper for that woman's touch which makes a drawing-room what it is. It was always ready—this room, though Sir John never sat in it. But for Lady Cantourne it was always more than ready.

Sir John went to the library and sat rather wearily down in the stiff-backed chair before the fire. He began by taking up the evening newspaper, but failed to find his eye-glasses, which had twisted up in some aggravating manner with his necktie. So he laid aside the journal and gave way to the weakness of looking into the fire.

Once or twice his head dropped forward rather suddenly so that his clean-shaven chin touched his tie-pin, and this without a feeling of sleepiness warranting the relaxation of the spinal column. He sat up suddenly on each occasion and threw back his shoulders.

'Almost seems,' he muttered once, 'as if I were getting to be an old man.'

After that he remembered nothing until the butler, coming in with the lamp, said that Lady Cantourne was in the drawing-room. The man busied himself with the curtains, carefully avoiding a glance in his master's direction. No one had ever

found Sir John asleep in a chair during the hours that other people watch, and this faithful old servant was not going to begin to do so now.

'Ah,' said Sir John, surreptitiously composing his collar and voluminous necktie, 'thank you.'

He rose and glanced at the clock. It was nearly seven. He had slept through the most miserable hour of Millicent Chyne's life.

At the head of the spacious staircase he paused in front of the mirror, half hidden behind exotics, and pressed down his wig behind either ear. Then he went into the drawing-room.

Lady Cantourne was standing impatiently on the hearthrug, and scarcely responded to his bow.

'Has Jack been here?' she asked.

'No.'

She stamped a foot, still neat despite its long journey over a road that had never been very smooth. Her manner was that of a commander-in-chief, competent but unfortunate in the midst of a great reverse.

'He has not been here this afternoon?'

'No,' answered Sir John, closing the door behind him.

'And you have not heard anything from him?'

'Not a word. As you know, I am not fortunate enough to be fully in his confidence.'

Lady Cantourne glanced round the room as if looking for some object upon which to fix her attention. It was a characteristic movement which he knew, although he had only seen it once or twice before. It indicated that if there was an end to Lady Cantourne's wit, she had almost reached that undesirable bourne.

'He has broken off his engagement,' she said, looking her companion very straight in the face, '*now*—at the eleventh hour. Do you know anything about it?'

She came closer to him, looking up from her compact little five-feet-two with discerning eyes.

'John!' she exclaimed.

She came still nearer and laid her gloved hands upon his sleeve.

'John! you know something about this.'

'I should like to know more,' he said suavely. 'I am afraid —Millicent will be inconvenienced.'

Lady Cantourne looked keenly at him for a moment. Physically she almost stood on tip-toe, mentally she did it without disguise. Then she turned away and sat on a chair which had always been set apart for her.

'It is a question,' she said gravely, 'whether anyone has a right to punish a woman so severely.'

The corner of Sir John's mouth twitched.

'I would rather punish her than have Jack punished for the rest of his life.'

'*Et moi?*' she snapped impatiently.

'Ah!' with a gesture learnt in some foreign court, 'I can only ask your forgiveness. I can only remind you that she is not your daughter—if she were she would be a different woman—while he is my son.'

Lady Cantourne nodded as if to indicate that he need explain no more.

'How did you do it?' she asked quietly.

'I did not do it. I merely suggested to Guy Osgard that he should call on you. Millicent and her *fiancé*—the other—were alone in the drawing-room when we arrived. Thinking that I might be *de trop* I withdrew, and left the young people to settle it among themselves, which they have apparently done! I am, like yourself, a great advocate for allowing young people to settle things among themselves. They are also welcome to their enjoyment of the consequences so far as I am concerned.'

'But Millicent was never engaged to Guy Osgard.'

'Did she tell you so?' asked Sir John with a queer smile.

'Yes.'

'And you believed her?'

'Of course—and you?'

Sir John smiled his courtliest smile.

'I always believe a lady,' he answered, 'before her face. Mr. Guy Osgard gave it out in Africa that he was engaged to be married, and he even declared that he was returning home to be married. Jack did the same in every respect. Unfortunately there was only one fond heart waiting for the couple of them at home. That is why I thought it expedient to give the young people an opportunity of settling it between themselves.'

The smile left his worn old face. He moved uneasily and walked to the fireplace, where he stood with his unsteady hands moving idly, almost nervously, among the ornaments on the

mantelpiece. He committed the rare discourtesy of almost turning his back upon a lady.

'I must ask you to believe,' he said, looking anywhere but at her, 'that I did not forget you in the matter. I may seem to have acted with an utter disregard for your feelings——'

He broke off suddenly, and, turning, he stood on the hearthrug with his feet apart, his hands clasped behind his back, his head slightly bowed.

'I drew on the reserve of an old friendship,' he said. 'You were kind enough to say the other day that you were indebted to me to some extent. You are indebted to me to a larger extent than you perhaps realise. You owe me fifty years of happiness—fifty years of a life that might have been happy had you decided differently when——when we were younger. I do not blame you now—I never have blamed you. But the debt is there—you know my life, you know almost every day of it—you cannot deny the debt. I drew upon that.'

And the white-haired woman raised her hand.

'Don't,' she said gently, 'please don't say any more. I know all that your life has been, and why. You did quite right. What is a little trouble to me, a little passing inconvenience, the tattle of a few idle tongues, compared with what Jack's life is to you? I see now that I ought to have opposed it strongly instead of letting it take its course. You were right—you always have been right, John. There is a sort of consolation in the thought. I like it. I like to think that you were always right and that it was I who was wrong. It confirms my respect for you. We shall get over this somehow.'

'The young lady,' suggested Sir John, 'will get over it after the manner of her kind. She will marry some one else, let us hope, before her wedding-dress goes out of fashion.'

'Millicent will have to get over it as she may. Her feelings need scarcely be taken into consideration.'

Lady Cantourne made a little movement towards the door. There was much to see to—much of that women's work which makes weddings the wild, confused ceremonies that they are.

'I am afraid,' said Sir John, 'that I never thought of taking them into consideration. As you know I hardly considered yours. I hope I have not overdrawn that reserve.'

He had crossed the room as he spoke to open the door for her. His fingers were on the handle but he did not turn it, awaiting

her answer. She did not look at him, but past him towards the shaded lamp, with that desire to fix her attention upon some inanimate object which he knew of old.

'The reserve,' she answered, 'will stand more than that. It has accumulated—with compound interest. But I deny the debt of which you spoke just now. There is no debt. I have paid it, year by year, day by day. For each one of those fifty years of unhappiness I have paid a year—of regret.'

He opened the door and she passed out into the brilliantly lighted passage and down the stairs, where the servants were waiting to open the door and help her to her carriage.

Sir John did not go downstairs with her.

Later on he dined in his usual solitary grandeur. He was as carefully dressed as ever. The discipline of his household—like the discipline under which he held himself—was unrelaxed.

'What wine is this?' he asked when he had tasted the port.

'Yellow seal, sir,' replied the butler confidentially.

Sir John sipped again.

'It is a new bin,' he said.

'Yes, sir. First bottle of the lower bin, sir.'

Sir John nodded with an air of self-satisfaction. He was pleased to have proved to himself and to the 'damned butler,' who had caught him napping in the library, that he was still a young man in himself, with senses and taste unimpaired. But his hand was at the small of his back as he returned to the library.

He was not at all sure about Jack—did not know whether to expect him or not. Jack did not always do what one might have expected him to do under given circumstances. And Sir John rather liked him for it. Perhaps it was that small taint of heredity which is in blood, and makes it thicker than water.

'Nothing like blood, sir,' he was in the habit of saying, 'in horses, dogs, and men.' And thereafter he usually threw back his shoulders.

The good blood that ran in his veins was astir to-night. The incidents of the day had aroused him from the peacefulness that lies under a weight of years (we have to lift the years one by one and lay them aside before we find it), and Sir John Meredith would have sat very upright in his chair were it not for that carping pain in his back.

He waited for an hour with his eyes almost continually on the clock, but Jack never came. Then he rang the bell.

'Coffee,' he said. 'I like punctuality if you please.'

'Thought Mr. Meredith might be expected, sir,' murmured the butler humbly.

Sir John was reading the evening paper, or appearing to read it, although he had not his glasses.

'Oblige me by refraining from thought,' he said urbanely.

So the coffee was brought, and Sir John consumed it in silent majesty. While he was pouring out his second cup—of a diminutive size—the bell rang. He set down the silver coffee-pot with a clatter, as if his nerves were not quite so good as they used to be.

It was not Jack, but a note from him.

'MY DEAR FATHER,—Circumstances have necessitated the breaking off of my engagement at the last moment. To-morrow's ceremony will not take place. As the above-named circumstances were partly under your control, I need hardly offer an explanation. I leave town and probably England to-night.—I am, your affectionate son,

'JOHN MEREDITH.'

There were no signs of haste or discomposure. The letter was neatly written in the somewhat large caligraphy, firm, bold, ornate, which Sir John had insisted on Jack's learning. The stationery bore a club crest. It was an eminently gentlemanly communication. Sir John read it and gravely tore it up, throwing it into the fire, where he watched it burn.

Nothing was farther from his mind than sentiment. He was not much given to sentiment, this hard-hearted old sire of an ancient stock. He never thought of the apocryphal day when he, being laid in his grave, should at last win the gratitude of his son.

'When I am dead and gone you may be sorry for it,' were not the words that any man should hear from his lips.

More than once during their lives Lady Cantourne had said :

'You never change your mind, John,' referring to one thing or another. And he had invariably answered :

'No, I am not the sort of man to change.'

He had always known his own mind. When he had been in a position to rule he had done so with a rod of iron. His purpose had ever been inflexible. Jack had been the only person who had ever openly opposed his desire. In this, as in other matters, his

indomitable will had carried the day, and in the moment of triumph it is only the weak who repine. Success should have no disappointment for the man who has striven for it if his will be strong.

Sir John rather liked the letter. It could only have been written by a son of his—admitting nothing, not even defeat. But he was disappointed. He had hoped that Jack would come—that some sort of a reconciliation would be patched up. And somehow the disappointment affected him physically. It attacked him in the back, and intensified the pain there. It made him feel weak and unlike himself. He rang the bell.

‘Go round,’ he said to the butler, ‘to Dr. Damer, and ask him to call in during the evening if he has time.’

The butler busied himself with the coffee-tray, hesitating, desirous of gaining time.

‘Anything wrong, sir? I hope you are not feeling ill,’ he said nervously.

‘Ill, sir!’ cried Sir John. ‘D—n it, no; do I look ill? Just obey my orders if you please.’

CHAPTER XLIV.

MADE UP.

My faith is large in Time,
And that which shapes it to some perfect end.

“MY DEAR JACK,—At the risk of being considered an interfering old woman, I write to ask you whether you are not soon coming to England again. As you are aware, your father and I knew each other as children. We have known each other ever since—we are now almost the only survivors of our generation. My reason for troubling you with this communication is that during the last six months I have noticed a very painful change in your father. He is getting very old—he has no one but servants about him. You know his manner—it is difficult for anyone to approach him, even for me. If you could come home—by accident—I think that you will never regret it in after life. I need not suggest discretion as to this letter.—Your affectionate friend,

‘CAROLINE CANTOURNE.’

Jack Meredith read this letter in the coffee-room of the Hotel of the Four Seasons at Wiesbaden. It was a lovely morning—the

sun shone down through the trees of the Friedrichstrasse upon that spotless pavement, of which the stricken wot; the fresh breeze came bowling down from the Taunus mountains all balsamic and invigorating—it picked up the odours of the Seringa and flowering currant in the Kurgarten, and threw itself in at the open window of the coffee-room of the Hotel of the Four Seasons.

Jack Meredith was restless. Such odours as are borne on the morning breeze are apt to make those men restless who have not all that they want. And is not their name legion? The morning breeze is to the strong the moonlight of the sentimental. That which makes one vaguely yearn incites the other to get up and take.

By the train leaving Wiesbaden for Cologne, 'over Mainz,' as the guide-book hath it, Jack Meredith left for England, in which country he had not set foot for fifteen months. Guy Oscar was in Cashmere; the Simiacine was almost forgotten as a nine days' wonder except by those who live by the ills of mankind. Millicent Chyne had degenerated into a restless society 'hack.' With great skill she had posed as a martyr. She had allowed it to be understood that she, having remained faithful to Jack Meredith through his time of adversity, had been heartlessly thrown over when fortune smiled upon him and there was a chance of his making a more brilliant match. With a chivalry which was not without a keen shaft of irony, father and son allowed this story to pass uncontradicted. Perhaps a few believed it; perhaps they had foreseen the future. It may have been that they knew that Millicent Chyne, surrounded by the halo of whatever story she might invent, would be treated with a certain careless nonchalance by the older men, with a respectful avoidance by the younger. Truly women have the deepest punishment for their sins here on earth; for sooner or later the time will come—after the brilliancy of the first triumph, after the less pure satisfaction of the skilled siren—the time will come when all that they want is an enduring, honest love. And it is written that an enduring love cannot, with the best will in the world, be bestowed on an unworthy object. If a woman wishes to be loved purely she must have a pure heart, and *no past*, ready for the reception of that love. This is a *sine qua non*. The woman with a past has no future.

The short March day was closing in over London with that murky suggestion of hopelessness affected by metropolitan eventide when Jack Meredith presented himself at the door of his father's house.

In his reception by the servants there was a subtle suggestion of expectation which was not lost on his keen mind. There is no patience like that of expectation in an old heart. Jack Meredith felt vaguely that he had been expected thus daily for many months past.

He was shown into the library, and the tall form standing there on the hearthrug had not the outline for which he had looked. The battle between old age and a stubborn will is long. But old age wins. It never raises the siege. It starves the garrison out. Sir John Meredith's head seemed to have shrunk. The wig did not fit at the back. His clothes, always bearing the suggestion of emptiness, seemed to hang on ancient-given lines as if the creases were well established. The clothes were old. The fateful doctrine of not-worth-while had set in.

Father and son shook hands, and Sir John walked feebly to the stiff-backed chair, where he sat down in shamefaced silence. He was ashamed of his infirmities. His was the instinct of the dog that goes away into some hidden corner to die.

'I am glad to see you,' he said, using his two hands to push himself farther back in his chair.

There was a little pause. The fire was getting low. It fell together with a feeble, crumbling sound.

'Shall I put some coals on?' asked Jack.

A simple question—if you will. But it was asked by the son in such a tone of quiet, filial submission, that a whole volume could not contain all that it said to the old man's proud, unbending heart.

'Yes, my boy, do.'

And the last six years were wiped away like evil writing from a slate.

There was no explanation. These two men were not of those who explain themselves, and in the warmth of explanation say things which they do not fully mean. The opinions that each had held during the years they had left behind had perhaps been modified on both sides, but neither sought details of the modification. They knew each other now, and each respected the indomitable will of the other.

They inquired after each other's health. They spoke of events of a common interest. Trifles of every-day occurrence, seemed to contain absorbing details. But it is the every-day occurrence that makes the life. It was the putting on of the coals that reconciled these two men.

'Let me see,' said Sir John, 'you gave up your rooms before you left England, did you not?'

'Yes.'

Jack drew forward his chair and put his feet out towards the fire. It was marvellous how thoroughly at home he seemed to be.

'Then,' continued Sir John, 'where is your luggage?'

'I left it at the club.'

'Send along for it. Your room is—er, quite ready for you. I shall be glad if you will make use of it as long as you like. You will be free to come and go as if you were in your own house.'

Jack nodded with a strange, twisted little smile, as if he were suffering from cramp in the legs. It was cramp—at the heart.

'Thanks,' he said, 'I should like nothing better. Shall I ring?'

'If you please.'

Jack rang and they waited in the fading daylight without speaking. At times Sir John moved his limbs, his hand on the arm of the chair and his feet on the hearthrug with the jerky, half-restless energy of the aged which is not pleasant to see.

When the servant came it was Jack who gave the orders, and the butler listened to them with a sort of enthusiasm. When he had closed the door behind him he pulled down his waistcoat with a jerk, and as he walked downstairs he muttered 'Thank 'eaven!' twice, and wiped away a tear from his bibulous eye.

'What have you been doing with yourself since—I saw you?' inquired Sir John conversationally when the door was closed.

'I have been out to India—merely for the voyage. I went with Osgard, who is out there still, after big game.'

Sir John Meredith nodded.

'I like that man,' he said, 'he is tough. I like tough men. He wrote me a letter before he went away. It was the letter of—one gentleman to another. Is he going to spend the rest of his life "after big game"?''

Jack laughed.

'It seems rather like it. He is cut out for that sort of life. He is too big for narrow streets and cramped houses.'

'And matrimony?'

'Yes—and matrimony.'

Sir John was leaning forward in his chair, his two withered hands clasped on his knees.

'You know,' he said slowly, blinking at the fire, 'he cared for that girl—more than you did, my boy.'

'Yes,' answered Jack softly.

Sir John looked towards him, but he said nothing. His attitude was interrogatory. There were a thousand questions in the turn of his head, questions which one gentleman could not ask another.

Jack met his gaze. They were still wonderfully alike, these two men, though one was in his prime while the other was infirm. On each face there was the stamp of a long-drawn silent pride; each was a type of those haughty conquerors who stepped, mail-clad, on our shore eight hundred years ago. Form and feature, mind and heart, had been handed down from father to son, as great types are.

'One may have the right feeling and bestow it by mistake on the wrong person,' said Jack.

Sir John's fingers were at his lips.

'Yes,' he said rather indistinctly, 'while the right person is waiting for it.'

Jack looked up sharply, as if he either had not heard or did not understand.

'While the right person is waiting for it,' repeated Sir John deliberately.

'The right person——?'

'Jocelyn Gordon,' explained Sir John, 'is the right person.'

Jack shrugged his shoulders and leant back so that the fire-light did not shine upon his face. 'So I found out eighteen months ago,' he said, 'when it was too late.'

'There is no such thing as too late for that,' said Sir John in his great wisdom. 'Even if you were both quite old it would not be too late. I have known it for longer than you. I found it out two years ago.'

Jack looked across the room into the keen, worldly-wise old face.

'How?' he inquired.

'From her. I found it out the moment she mentioned your name. I conducted the conversation in such a manner that she had frequently to say it, and whenever your name crossed her lips she—gave herself away.'

Jack shook his head with an incredulous smile.

'Moreover,' continued Sir John, 'I maintain that it is not too late.'

There followed a silence; both men seemed to be wrapped in thought, the same thoughts with a difference of forty years of life in the method of thinking them.

'I could not go to her with a lame story like that,' said Jack. 'I told her all about Millicent.'

'It is just a lame story like that that women understand,' answered Sir John. 'When I was younger I thought as you do. I thought that a man must needs bring a clean slate to the woman he asks to be his wife. It is only his hands that must be clean. Women see deeper into these mistakes of ours than we do, they see the good of them where we only see the wound to our vanity. Sometimes one would almost be inclined to think that they prefer a few mistakes in the past because it makes the present surer. Their romance is a different thing from ours—it is a better thing, deeper and less selfish. They can wipe the slate clean and never look at it again. And the best of them—rather like the task.'

Jack made no reply. Sir John Meredith's chin was resting on his vast necktie. He was looking with failing eyes into the fire. He spoke like one who was sure of himself—confident in his slowly accumulated store of that knowledge which is not written in books.

'Will you oblige me?' he asked.

Jack moved in his chair, but he made no answer. Sir John did not indeed expect it. He knew his son too well.

'Will you,' he continued, 'go out to Africa and take your lame story to Jocelyn—just as it is?'

There was a long silence. The old worn-out clock on the mantelpiece wheezed and struck six.

'Yes,' answered Jack at length, 'I will go.'

Sir John nodded his head with a sigh of relief. All, indeed, comes to him who waits.

'I have seen a good deal of life,' he said suddenly, arousing himself and sitting upright in the stiff-backed chair, 'here and there in the world; and I have found that the happiest people are those who began by thinking that it was too late. The romance of youth is only fit to write about in books. It is too delicate a fabric for every-day use. It soon wears out or gets torn.'

Jack did not seem to be listening.

'But,' continued Sir John, 'you must not waste time. If I may suggest it, you will do well to go at once.'

'Yes,' answered Jack, 'I will go in a month or so. I should like to see you in a better state of health before I leave you.'

Sir John pulled himself together. He threw back his shoulders and stiffened his neck.

'My health is excellent,' he replied sturdily. 'Of course I am beginning to feel my years a little, but one must expect to do that after—eh—er—sixty. *C'est la vie.*'

He made a little movement of the hands.

'No,' he went on, 'the sooner you go the better.'

'I do not like leaving you,' persisted Jack.

Sir John laughed rather testily.

'That is rather absurd,' he said; 'I am accustomed to being left. I have always lived alone. You will do me a favour if you will go now and take your passage out to Africa.'

'Now—this evening?'

'Yes—at once. These offices close about half-past six, I believe. You will just have time to do it before dinner.'

Jack rose and went towards the door. He went slowly, almost reluctantly.

'Do not trouble about me,' said Sir John, 'I am accustomed to being left.'

He repeated it when the door had closed behind his son.

The fire was low again. It was almost dying. The daylight was fading every moment. The cinders fell together with a crumbling sound, and a greyness crept into their glowing depths. The old man sitting there made no attempt to add fresh fuel.

'I am accustomed,' he said with a half-cynical smile, 'to being left.'

CHAPTER XLV.

THE TELEGRAM.

How could it end in any other way?

You called me, and I came home to your heart.

'THEY tell me, sir, that Missis Marie—that is, Missis Durnovo—has gone back to her people at Sierra Leone.'

Thus spoke Joseph to his master one afternoon in March, not so many years ago. They were on board the steamer *Bogamayo*.

which good vessel was pounding down the West Coast of Africa at her best speed. The captain reckoned that he would be anchored at Loango by half-past seven or eight o'clock that evening. There were only seven passengers on board, and dinner had been ordered an hour earlier for the convenience of all concerned. Joseph was packing his master's clothes in the spacious cabin allotted to him. The owners of the steamer had thought it worth their while to make the finder of the Simiacine as comfortable as circumstances allowed. The noise of that great drug had directed towards the West Coast of Africa that floating scum of ne'er-do-wellness which is ever on the alert for some new land of promise.

'Who told you that?' asked Jack, drying his hands on a towel.

'One of the stewards, sir—a man that was laid up at Sierra Leone in the hospital.'

Jack Meredith paused for a moment before going on deck. He looked out through the open porthole towards the blue shadow on the horizon which was Africa—a country that he had never seen three years before, and which had all along been destined to influence his whole life.

'It was the best thing she could do,' he said. 'It is to be hoped that she will be happy.'

'Yes, sir, it is. She deserves it, if that goes for anything in the heavenly reckonin'. She's a fine woman—a good woman that, sir.'

'Yes.'

Joseph was folding a shirt very carefully.

'A bit dusky,' he said, smoothing out the linen folds reflectively, 'but I shouldn't have minded that if I had been a marryin' man, but—but I'm not.'

He laid the shirt in the portmanteau and looked up. Jack Meredith had gone on deck.

While Maurice and Jocelyn Gordon were still at dinner that same evening a messenger came announcing the arrival of the *Bogamayo* in the roads. This news had the effect of curtailing the meal. Maurice Gordon was liable to be called away at any moment thus by the arrival of a steamer. It was not long before he rose from the table and lighted a cigar preparatory to going down to his office, where the captain of the steamer was by this time probably awaiting him. It was a full moon, and the glorious golden light of the equatorial night shone through the high trees

like a new dawn. Hardly a star was visible; even those of the southern hemisphere pale beside the southern moon.

Maurice Gordon crossed the open space of cultivated garden and plunged into the black shadow of the forest. His footsteps were inaudible. Suddenly he ran almost into the arms of a man.

'Who the devil is that?' he cried.

'Meredith,' answered a voice.

'Meredith—Jack Meredith, is that you?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I'm blowed!' exclaimed Maurice Gordon, shaking hands—'likewise glad. What brought you out here again?'

'Oh, pleasure!' replied Jack, with his face in the shade.

'Pleasure! you've come to the wrong place for that. However, I'll let you find that out for yourself. Go on to the bungalow; I'll be back in less than an hour. You'll find Jocelyn in the verandah.'

When Maurice left her Jocelyn went out into the verandah. It was the beginning of the hot season. At midday the sun on his journey northward no longer cast a shadow. Jocelyn could not go out in the daytime at this period of the year. For fresh air she had to rely upon a long, dreamy evening in the verandah.

She sat down in her usual chair while the moonlight, red and glowing, made a pattern on the floor and on her white dress with the shadows of the creepers. The sea was very loud that night, rising and falling like the breath of some huge sleeping creature.

Jocelyn Gordon fell into a reverie. Life was very dull at Loango. There was too much time for thought and too little to think about. This girl only had the past, and her past was all comprised in a few months—the few months still known at Loango as the Simiacine year. She had lapsed into a bad habit of thinking that her life was over, that the daylight of it had waned, and that there was nothing left now but the grey remainder of the evening. She was wondering now why it had all come—why there had been any daylight at all. Above these thoughts she wondered why the feeling was still in her heart that Jack Meredith had gone out of her life for ever. There was no reason why she should ever meet him again. He was, so far as she knew, married to Millicent Chyne more than a year ago, although she had never seen the announcement of the wedding. He had drifted into Loango and into her life by the merest accident, and now that the Simiacine Plateau had been finally abandoned there was no reason why any of the original finders should come to Loango again.

And the creepers were pushed aside by one who knew the method of their growth. A silver glory of moonlight fell on the verandah floor, and the man of whom she was thinking stood before her.

'You!' she exclaimed.

'Yes.'

She rose, and they shook hands. They stood looking at each other for a few moments, and a thousand things that had never been said seemed to be understood between them.

'Why have you come?' she asked abruptly.

'To tell you a story.'

She looked up with a sort of half smile, as if she suspected some pleasantry of which she had not yet detected the drift.

'A long story,' he explained, 'which has not even the merit of being amusing. Please sit down again.'

She obeyed him.

The curtain of hanging leaves and flowers had fallen into place again; the shadowed tracery was on her dress and on the floor once more.

He stood in front of her and told her his story, as Sir John had suggested. He threw no romance into it—attempted no extenuation—but related the plain, simple facts of the last few years with the semi-cynical suggestion of humour that was sometimes his. And the cloak of pride that had fallen upon his shoulders made him hide much that was good, while he dragged forward his own shortcomings. She listened in silence. At times there hovered round her lips a smile. It usually came when he represented himself in a bad light, and there was a suggestion of superior wisdom in it as if she knew something of which he was ignorant.

He was never humble. It was not a confession. It was not even an explanation, but only a story—a very lame story indeed—which gained nothing by the telling. And he was not the hero of it.

And all came about as wise old Sir John Meredith had predicted. It is not our business to record what Jocelyn said. Women—the best of them—have some things in their hearts which can only be said once to one person. Men cannot write them down; printers cannot print them.

The lame story was told to the end, and at the end it was accepted. When Sir John's name was mentioned—when the interview in the library of the great London house was briefly touched

upon—Jack saw the flutter of a small lace pocket-handkerchief, and at no other time. The slate was wiped clean, and it almost seemed that Jocelyn preferred it thus with the scratches upon it where the writing had been.

Maurice Gordon did not come back in an hour. It was nearly ten o'clock before they heard his footsteps on the gravel. By that time Jocelyn had heard the whole story. She had asked one or two questions which somehow cast a different light upon the narrative, and she had listened to the answers with a grave judicial little smile—the smile of a judge whose verdict was pre-ordained, whose knowledge had nothing to gain from evidence.

Because she loved him she took his story and twisted it and turned it to a shape of her own liking. Those items which he had considered important she passed over as trifles; the trifles she magnified into the corner-stones upon which the edifice was built. She set the lame story upon its legs and it stood upright. She believed what he had never told; and much that he related she chose to discredit—because she loved him. She perceived motives where he assured her there were none; she recognised the force of circumstance where he took the blame to himself—because she loved him. She maintained that the past was good, that he could not have acted differently, that she would not have had it otherwise—because she loved him.

And who shall say that she was wrong?

Jack went out to meet Maurice Gordon when they heard his footsteps, and as they walked back to the house he told him. Gordon was quite honest about it.

'I hoped,' he said, 'when I ran against you in the wood that that was why you had come back. Nothing could have given me greater happiness. Hang it, I *am* glad, old chap!'

They sat far into the night arranging their lives. Jack was nervously anxious to get back to England. He could not rid his mind of the picture he had seen as he left his father's presence to go and take his passage to Africa—the picture of an old man sitting in a stiff-backed chair before a dying fire. Moreover he was afraid of Africa; the Irritability of Africa had laid its hand upon him almost as soon as he had set his foot upon its shore. He was afraid of the climate for Jocelyn; he was afraid of it for himself. The happiness that comes late must be firmly held to; nothing must be forgotten to secure it, or else it may slip between the fingers at the last moment.

Those who have snatched happiness late in life can tell of a thousand details carefully attended to—a whole existence laid out in preparation for it, of health fostered, small pleasures relinquished, days carefully spent.

Jack Meredith was nervously apprehensive that his happiness might even now slip through his fingers. Truly, climatic influence is a strange and wonderful thing. It was Africa that had done this, and he was conscious of it. He remembered Victor Durnovo's strange outburst on their first meeting a few miles below Msala on the Ogowe river, and the remembrance only made him the more anxious that Jocelyn and he should turn their backs upon the accursed West Coast for ever.

Before they went to bed that night it was all arranged. Jack Meredith had carried his point. Maurice and Jocelyn were to sail with him for England by the first boat. Jocelyn and he compiled a telegram to be sent off first thing by a native boat to St. Paul de Loanda. It was addressed to Sir John Meredith, London, and signed 'Meredith, Loango.' The text of it was:

'I bring Jocelyn home by first boat.'

.

And the last words, like the first, must be of an old man in London. We found him in the midst of a brilliant assembly; we leave him alone. We leave him lying stiffly on his solemn four-post bed, with his keen proud face turned fearlessly toward his Maker. His lips are still; they wear a smile which even in death is slightly cynical. On the table at his bedside lies a submarine telegram from Africa. It is unopened.

THE END.



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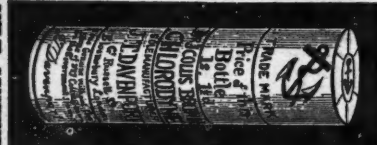


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*** In the article 'The Roman "Index"' published in the March number of the 'Cornhill Magazine,' our contributor is incorrect in stating that 'nearly all the English poets' except Dryden figure in the list. Milton, it is true, is condemned for an Italian version of 'Paradise Lost'; and Goldsmith and Addison, but only for minor works in each case.

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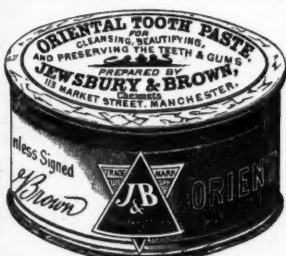
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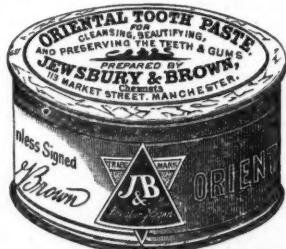
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*Founded 1823.*



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*or*

£50 A YEAR for 20 YEARS

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# CLERICAL MEDICAL & GENERAL

ESTABLISHED  
1824.

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### Assistant Actuary.

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### Actuary & Secretary.

BENJAMIN NEWBATT, ESQ.

### FINANCIAL POSITION, June 30th 1893.

|                                                                                                   |             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Assets, over                                                                                      | £23,000,000 |
| Income, over                                                                                      | £280,000    |
| New Assurances in the year, over                                                                  | £470,000    |
| Annual Premiums thereon                                                                           | £16,000     |
| Sum Divided among the Assured, 1892, over<br>(yielding an average Cash Bonus of 35% on Premiums.) | £252,000    |
| Reversionary Addition to Policies<br>corresponding thereto, nearly                                | £500,000    |

CHIEF OFFICE: 15, ST JAMES'S SQUARE,  
LONDON.

S.W.



# Clerical, Medical and General

## 13TH BONUS-1892.

### RESERVES.

The Valuation having been made by the most stringent Tables of Mortality in use (the  $HM$  and  $HMS$  Tables of the Institute of Actuaries), in combination with the **very low rate of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. interest** (a rate employed by two other offices only), and to the **high reserves** so brought out, viz., **£2,533,078**, further sums amounting to **£90,000** having been added, the **total reserves**, relatively to the engagements they have to meet, were brought up to an amount in excess, it is believed, of those of any other office whatever.

### PROFITS.

**NOTWITHSTANDING** these large and exemplary reserves, the **condition of prosperity** of the Society was such that the **divisible surplus** in respect of the **5 years** was **larger by £53,450** than that of any previous quinquennium. The sum remaining for **division among the Assured**, viz., **£352,500**, which was **larger by £40,000** than any previous one, provided a Cash Bonus averaging **35 per cent.** on the premiums of the quinquennium, being the **largest Cash Bonus ever declared** by the Society. The following is a

### TABLE OF SPECIMEN BONUSES

*Declared on Whole-Life Policies of £1,000 each, effected by Annual Premiums at the ages undermentioned.*

| Duration of Policy. | 20      |            | 30      |            | 35      |            |
|---------------------|---------|------------|---------|------------|---------|------------|
|                     | Cash.   | Reversion. | Cash.   | Reversion. | Cash.   | Reversion. |
| 5 years             | £ s. d. | £ s. d.    | £ s. d. | £ s. d.    | £ s. d. | £ s. d.    |
| 5 years             | 30 10 0 | 86 0 0     | 41 0 0  | 95 0 0     | 47 10 0 | 101 0 0    |
| 10 "                | 31 0 0  | 79 10 0    | 41 10 0 | 88 10 0    | 48 0 0  | 92 10 0    |
| 15 "                | 31 10 0 | 73 0 0     | 42 0 0  | 81 0 0     | 48 0 0  | 84 0 0     |
| 20 "                | 32 0 0  | 67 10 0    | 42 0 0  | 73 10 0    | 48 0 0  | 77 0 0     |
| 25 "                | 32 0 0  | 62 0 0     | 42 0 0  | 67 10 0    | 48 10 0 | 72 0 0     |
| 30 "                | 32 0 0  | 56 10 0    | 42 10 0 | 63 0 0     | 49 0 0  | 67 0 0     |

| Duration of Policy. | 40      |            | 45      |            | 50      |            |
|---------------------|---------|------------|---------|------------|---------|------------|
|                     | Cash.   | Reversion. | Cash.   | Reversion. | Cash.   | Reversion. |
| 5 years             | £ s. d. | £ s. d.    | £ s. d. | £ s. d.    | £ s. d. | £ s. d.    |
| 5 years             | 56 0 0  | 108 10 0   | 65 0 0  | 114 0 0    | 78 0 0  | 126 0 0    |
| 10 "                | 56 0 0  | 98 10 0    | 65 0 0  | 104 10 0   | 79 10 0 | 118 0 0    |
| 15 "                | 56 0 0  | 90 10 0    | 66 0 0  | 98 0 0     | 79 10 0 | 109 10 0   |
| 20 "                | 57 0 0  | 84 10 0    | 66 0 0  | 91 0 0     | 80 10 0 | 103 10 0   |
| 25 "                | 57 0 0  | 78 10 0    | 66 10 0 | 86 0 0     | 82 0 0  | 99 0 0     |
| 30 "                | 57 10 0 | 74 0 0     | 68 0 0  | 82 10 0    | 82 10 0 | 95 10 0    |

**N.B.**—In future the method of distributing profits will be so modified that the proportion of profits allotted to any Policy will increase with its increased duration, a modification in favour of the older Policyholders which, it is believed, will not appreciably affect the large initial bonuses here shown to be given to the younger members.

Chief Office:—15 ST. JAMES'S SQUARE, LONDON, S.W.

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# Life Assurance Society.

## ASSURANCE AT PRIME COST.

ONE of the wants of the present day is a table of whole-life premiums, which, while making the least possible demand on the resources of the Assured, shall at the same time admit the Policies to full Bonus advantages. The annexed table of reduced premiums, which are believed to be lower than any hitherto published for Policies issued free from debt, has been framed to meet this want. Being below the mathematical premiums for the several risks provided in the Society's full premiums, these reduced premiums may properly be said to supply "assurance at prime cost." They depend on the realization of a certain ratio of profit, and in the event of the profit at any division being insufficient, the sum assured by any particular policy will need to be charged with payment of such a sum as will make good its share of the deficiency, unless the Assured prefer to pay off the balance due to the Society. So large and so consistent, however, have been the profits of this Society, that there is little likelihood of any such deficiency arising.

The new premiums, which are payable annually, are at all ages 75 per cent. only of the ordinary whole-life, with-profit rates, the Society advancing the remaining 25 per cent. The 25 per cent. so provided by the Society, accumulated at 5 per cent. interest in advance, will be a charge on the current bonus. If death should occur within the quinquennial bonus period, the interim bonus will exactly meet the current charge, and allow of the sum assured being paid without deduction. If, on the other hand, the Policy should survive the quinquennial period and share in the declared bonus, it may be expected that the cash bonus allotted at each division will more than meet the current charge.

This surplus cash bonus may, on its declaration, either be at once received by the Assured, or, if he prefer it, be converted into an equivalent Reversionary Bonus, payable with the sum assured in the event, and in the event only, of death occurring subsequently to the attainment of an age to be stated in the Policy.

Further particulars as to the Prime Cost System will be furnished on application.

### REDUCED ANNUAL PREMIUM

For £100 at death.

| AGE NEXT BIRTH-DAY. | ANNUAL PREMIUM. |
|---------------------|-----------------|
|                     | £ s. d.         |
| 20                  | 1 7 11          |
| 21                  | 1 8 8           |
| 22                  | 1 9 5           |
| 23                  | 1 10 2          |
| 24                  | 1 11 2          |
| 25                  | 1 11 11         |
| 26                  | 1 12 10         |
| 27                  | 1 13 9          |
| 28                  | 1 14 8          |
| 29                  | 1 15 8          |
| 30                  | 1 16 7          |
| 31                  | 1 17 6          |
| 32                  | 1 18 5          |
| 33                  | 1 19 7          |
| 34                  | 2 0 8           |
| 35                  | 2 1 10          |
| 36                  | 2 3 2           |
| 37                  | 2 4 5           |
| 38                  | 2 5 9           |
| 39                  | 2 7 3           |
| 40                  | 2 8 9           |
| 41                  | 2 10 3          |
| 42                  | 2 11 9          |
| 43                  | 2 13 3          |
| 44                  | 2 14 11         |
| 45                  | 2 16 8          |
| 46                  | 2 18 6          |
| 47                  | 3 0 5           |
| 48                  | 3 2 8           |
| 49                  | 3 5 3           |
| 50                  | 3 8 1           |

## INVALID LIVES.

ASSURANCES on Declined Lives, or others below the average standard of health, effected at rates proportioned to the risk, upon a system which gradually ameliorates and ultimately nullifies the original surcharge. (See Prospectus.)

Chief Office:—15 ST. JAMES'S SQUARE, LONDON, S.W.

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# CLERICAL MEDICAL & GENERAL

ESTABLISHED  
1824.

## LIFE ASSURANCE SOCIETY

13th BONUS—1892.

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**That the SOCIETY'S RESERVES**

**are now the STRONGEST,**

**and That its BONUSES**

**are amongst the LARGEST known.**

[See further particulars on previous pages.]

.....  
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THE NEXT DIVISION OF PROFITS will take place in January 1897. Profit Policies effected now or before the end of June will be entitled to one year's additional share of Profits.

The Last Bonus Report, the Full Prospectus, Forms of Proposal and every information on application.

B. NEWBATT,  
ACTUARY & SECRETARY.

November 1893.

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